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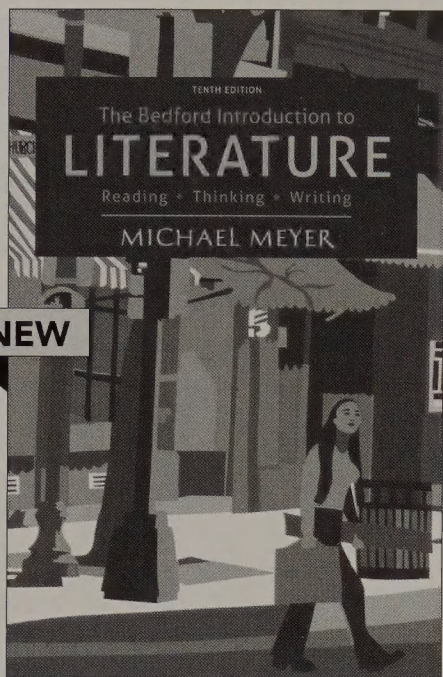
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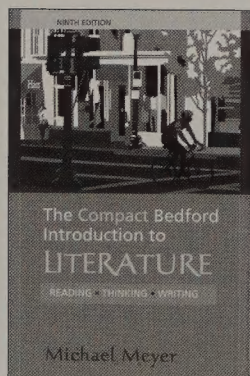
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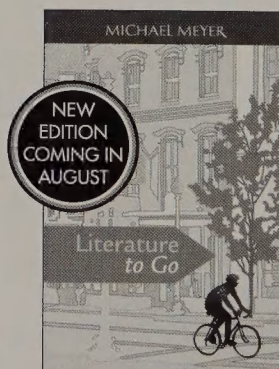


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## A Statement of Editorial Policy

*PMLA* welcomes essays of interest to those concerned with the study of language and literature. As the publication of a large and heterogeneous association, the journal is receptive to a variety of topics, whether general or specific, and to all scholarly methods and theoretical perspectives. The ideal *PMLA* essay exemplifies the best of its kind, whatever the kind; addresses a significant problem; draws out clearly the implications of its findings; and engages the attention of its audience through a concise, readable presentation. Manuscripts in languages other than English are accepted for review but must be accompanied by a detailed summary in English (generally of 1,000–1,500 words) and must be translated into English if they are recommended to the Editorial Board. Articles of fewer than 2,500 words or more than 9,000 words are not considered for publication. The word count includes notes but excludes works-cited lists and translations, which should accompany foreign language quotations. The MLA urges its contributors to be sensitive to the social implications of language and to seek wording free of discriminatory overtones.

Only members of the association may submit articles to *PMLA*. For a collaboratively written essay to be eligible for submission, all coauthors must be members of the MLA. *PMLA* does not publish book reviews or new works of fiction, nor does it accept articles that were previously published in any language. An article is considered previously published if it appears in print or in an online outlet with the traits of publication, such as editorial selection of content, a formal presentation, and ongoing availability. Online contexts that typically lack these traits include personal Web pages, discussion groups, and repositories. Each article submitted is sent to two reviewers, usually one consultant reader and one member of the Advisory Committee. Articles recommended by these readers are then sent to the members of the Editorial Board, who meet periodically with the editor to make final decisions. Until a final decision is reached, the author's name is not made known to consultant readers, to members of the Advisory Committee and the Editorial Board, or to the editor. Because the submission of an article simultaneously to more than one refereed journal can result in duplication of the demanding task of reviewing the manuscript, it is *PMLA*'s policy not to review articles that are under consideration by other journals. An article found to have been simultaneously submitted elsewhere will not be published in *PMLA* even if it has already been accepted for publication by the Editorial Board.

Submissions, prepared according to the *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing*, should be sent in duplicate as hard copy to the Managing Editor, *PMLA*, Modern Language Association, 26 Broadway, 3rd floor, New York, NY 10004-1789. With each submission please include a self-addressed envelope and enough postage for one copy to be returned. Authors' names should not appear on manuscripts; instead, a cover sheet, with the author's name and address and the title of the article, should accompany each manuscript. Authors should not refer to themselves in the first person

Cover: José Emilio Rodríguez, *Sri Pada*; Crotona Park, 1998. Gravel, 61 cm in diameter. Courtesy of the artist ([www.joserg.com](http://www.joserg.com)). In various locations the artist created the Buddhist symbol *śrī pāda*, or "sacred foot," from gravel without a binder, an impermanent medium. This installation was in Crotona Park, in Bronx, New York.



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"Editor's Column—In the House of Criticism"

MICHAEL BÉRUBÉ. "Presidential Address 2013—How We Got Here"

MRINALINI CHAKRAVORTY. "The Dead That Haunt *Anil's Ghost*: Subaltern Difference and Postcolonial Melancholia"

TRINYAN MARIANO. "The Law of Torts and the Logic of Lynching in Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition*"

ELDA E. TSOU. "'This Doesn't Mean What You'll Think': *Native Speaker*, Allegory, Race"

MICHELLE H. PHILLIPS. "The Children of Double Consciousness: From *The Souls of Black Folk* to the *Brownies' Book*"

## Theories and Methodologies

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*Carlos Fuentes: A Tribute: essays by* Anadeli Bencomo, Wendy B. Faris, Georgina García Gutiérrez Vélez, John Ochoa, Florence Olivier, Elena Poniatowska, Luz Rodríguez Carranza, José Ramón Ruisánchez, and Maarten van Delden

## Criticism in Translation

ANDRÉ JOLLES. "'Legend': An Excerpt from André Jolles's *Simple Forms*." Translation and introduction by Peter J. Schwartz

## Little-Known Documents

GWENDOLYN BENNETT. "The Ebony Flute." Introduction by Belinda Wheeler

JUAN DE CASTELLANOS. "An Early Florida Poem: Juan de Castellanos's 'Elegía a la Muerte de Juan Ponce de Leon.'" Translation and introduction by Thomas Hallock

MANUEL GONZÁLEZ PRADA. "The Church's Slaves." Translation by Cathleen Carris. Introduction by Thomas Ward

in the submitted text or notes if such references would identify them; any necessary references to the author's previous work, for example, should be in the third person. If the contribution includes any materials (e.g., quotations that exceed fair use, illustrations, charts, other graphics) that have been taken from another source, the author must obtain written permission to reproduce them in print and electronic formats.

## Features in PMLA

Manuscripts and correspondence related to the features described below should be sent to the Managing Editor, PMLA, Modern Language Association, 26 Broadway, 3rd floor, New York, NY 10004-1789.

## Special Topic

Articles on the general topic are invited; the subtopics listed are provided by way of example and suggestion only. Submissions to PMLA must meet the requirements given in the statement of editorial policy.

## Emotions

*Deadline for submissions: 4 November 2013*

Coordinators: Katharine Ann Jensen (Louisiana State Univ.) and Miriam L. Wallace (New Coll. of Florida)

How do human beings experience or recognize emotions—our own and those of others? What distinguishes an emotion from other faculties and sensations, and how do different fields engage these complex concepts? These questions have recently been the focus of affect studies, which elucidates how visceral forces beyond consciousness impel us toward movement, thought, and relation and explores affect's ethical, aesthetic, and political implications.

The nature and significance of emotion have engaged thinkers since ancient times. In fifth-century Greece, for example, Hippocrates developed the theory of the humors to posit an intrinsic relation between the body and the emotions. Indeed, discerning connections or disjunctions among body, mind, and emotion has preoccupied philosophers, political theorists, religious thinkers, and literary writers, among others, for millennia. The classification of kinds of emotion—love, joy, hatred, sadness, fear, shame, and so on—an emotion's positive or negative quality, and the ability to control one's emotions have also been enduring subjects of theory and debate. Visual and theatrical artists since the eighteenth century studied the facial and bodily manifestations of emotions to depict them persuasively, while Freud famously elaborated the deleterious effects of repressed emotions and conceived of human existence in terms of a persistent conflict between aggressive and erotic instincts.



The *PMLA* Editorial Board invites essays that reflect on theories or representations of emotions in any period or cultural tradition. Potential contributors are encouraged to consider such questions as these: In what ways have emotions been valued as a form of knowledge or refinement; in what ways have they been rejected or associated with the uneducated? How and why have emotions been gendered or racially defined? How have emotions been understood to affect the imagination? How has emotion been conceptualized as disembodied or as excessively embodied, and what are the implications of these competing notions? What have been the psychological aspects of emotions, whether repressed or unbridled? What are the affective dimensions of reading or viewing (sympathy, identification, alienation, subjective transformation)? What have been the epistemological, aesthetic, political, or moral dimensions of emotion?

### Criticism in Translation

MLA members are invited to submit to the *PMLA* Editorial Board proposals for translations. Articles, as well as chapters or sections of books that can function as independent units, will be considered. The originals may be in any language. Two types of proposals are welcome: (1) significant scholarship from earlier periods that has not lost its forcefulness and whose retrieval in English in *PMLA* would be a noteworthy event for a broad body of readers and (2) contemporary work of sufficient weight and potential influence to merit the attention of the field as a whole.

A member who wishes to make a proposal should first ascertain that no previous English translation exists. The proposer should then provide the managing editor with the following materials: (1) a photocopy of the original essay, (2) an extended summary of the entire essay in English, (3) an introductory statement of approximately 1,000 words, prepared in accordance with MLA style, that will be published with the essay if the essay is accepted, (4) information on the copyright status of the original (if the translation is accepted for publication, the proposer will be responsible for obtaining permission to print it). In addition, if the proposer wishes to serve as translator of the essay or to designate a translator (who must also be an MLA member), a 1,000-word sample of the translation should be submitted; otherwise the Editorial Board will select a translator.

The translated essays should normally not exceed *PMLA*'s 9,000-word limit. The Editorial Board will approve or decline the proposals, evaluate the quality of the translations, and cooperate with the proposers and translators.

### Little-Known Documents

MLA members are invited to submit to the *PMLA* Editorial Board proposals regarding little-known documentary material that merits the attention of a

## Forthcoming in *PMLA*

### IN OTHER ISSUES

LINDA GREGERSON. "Milton and the Tragedy of Nations"

LAURIE LANGBAUER. "Prolepsis and the Tradition of Juvenile Writing: Henry Kirke White and Robert Southey"

GEOFFREY SANBORN. "The Plagiarist's Craft: Fugitivity and Theatricality in *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*"

AARON SHAHEEN. "Strolling through the Slums of the Past: Ralph Werther's Love Affair with Victorian Womanhood in *Autobiography of an Androgyne*"

AMIT YAHAV. "Sonorous Duration: *Tristram Shandy* and the Temporality of Novels"

#### Little-Known Documents

"Playbill for George Lippard's *The Quaker City*." Introduction by Sari Altschuler and Aaron M. Tobiason

ADRIANA IVANCICH. "I Am Hemingway's Renata." Translation and introduction by Mark Cirino



broad range of readers. Consideration will be given to archival data from any period and in any language that do not exceed *PMLA*'s 9,000-word limit.

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### Solicited Contributions

The editor and the Editorial Board periodically invite studies and commentaries by specific authors on topics of wide interest. These contributions appear in the following series: Theories and Methodologies, The Changing Profession, The Book Market, The Journal World, Letters from Librarians, and Correspondents at Large. MLA members are welcome to suggest topics that might be addressed under these rubrics.



Guest Column

The New Public Humanists

JULIE ELLISON

JULIE ELLISON is professor of American culture and English at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. From 2001 to 2007 she served as founding director of Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life, a consortium of colleges and universities. The author of *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (U of Chicago P, 1999), as well as two earlier books, she is writing on the public project of the humanities.

*Public humanities is about finding both practical and conceptual locations, spaces, and translations between the various kinds of humanities work that people are doing.*

—Evan Carton (2009)

Blurring the Boundary

THE LINE BETWEEN THE ACADEMIC HUMANITIES AND THE PUBLIC humanities is fuzzy and getting more so all the time—and that is a good thing. We inherit a distinction between the public humanities, oriented to nonspecialist audiences and nonacademic careers, and the academic humanities, oriented to “disciplinary professionalism” (Bender 9).<sup>1</sup> While academic and public understandings of the humanities will not merge anytime soon, they can no longer be neatly drawn as distinct if contiguous domains. Well-marked paths that cross and recross this boundary delineate a third space—a space for the practice of public scholarship. Timothy K. Eatman refers to public scholarship as “scholarly or creative activity that joins serious intellectual endeavor with a commitment to public practice and public consequence” (“Engaged Scholarship” 18). In this intermediate zone, we can follow the tracks of academic humanists who partner with nonacademic institutions and organizations, interlaced with the footprints of publicly engaged cultural professionals based in other sectors. Citizens of William Paulson’s “enlarged humanities” (inclusive of “the entire project of making and remaking the social, cultural, and material collectives to which we belong” [191]), these scholars describe themselves as undertaking “different forms of making knowledge ‘about, for, and with’ diverse publics and communities,” as Eatman and I demonstrated in our



2008 report *Scholarship in Public* (Ellison and Eatman iv).<sup>2</sup>

There is sufficient evidence of the shift from the public humanities to the mediating practices of publicly engaged academic scholars to confirm the impression that a new sort of public humanities is finding traction in American colleges and universities. As Gregory Jay observes in his incisive survey of changing constructions of the humanities, there has been a “move *from* public humanities to public scholarship and engagement” (54).

Many academic humanists, myself included, see themselves as participants in the broader civic engagement movement in higher education, an unfolding response to the “Copernican revolution” that is agitating higher education (Scobey 48). An important strand of that movement is the effort to knit together public work and academic work. Not all civically engaged campus-community partnerships result in public scholarship, and not all public endeavors by scholars are civically engaged. But the idea of public scholarship as central to civic engagement in higher education is particularly resonant because it changes how faculty members see themselves. While what we make is important, the emergence of a new kind of public humanities registers most powerfully at the level of who we are.

I begin my reflections on this trend by exploring platforms for learning how to do public scholarship in the humanities. I look at graduate programs and humanities centers where the new public humanities has taken hold. Having described how the new public humanists name and claim professional identities, I examine the cycle of making, understanding, and writing the campus-community project, one of the most common genres of public engagement. I conclude by underscoring the importance of how academic humanists exercise “institutional agency” in support of the university’s public mission (Newfield 157).

First, though, some history is in order. The dual construction of the humanities, as

either academic or public, was inscribed in the formation of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), which originated as a support system for disciplinary professionalism. As Elizabeth Lynn suggests in her fine study of state humanities councils, the NEH was set up in 1965 in response to the demands of humanities scholars, who were legitimately unhappy about funding inequities after the creation of the National Science Foundation. The NEH was constituted as a powerful academic project (Ayers 26). The state humanities councils—vehicles for a new kind of public humanities programming—were launched in the early 1970s as the result of efforts to further legitimize the NEH as an agency that funds academic scholarship. The council movement began around the time that universities established the first public humanities degree programs on their campuses to prepare public humanities professionals for off-campus work. But the state councils aimed to translate faculty expertise in a different way and for different purposes, summed up in what Lynn categorizes as overtly civic “principles of access” and “‘democracy needs’ arguments” (3–4)—frameworks that remained, at best, supplementary to humanities departments. The persistent “two culture” system at the NEH has further inhibited a much-needed national conversation on how public programming and publicly engaged academic scholarship might converge. This internal divide at the NEH may be closing as a result of the agency’s investment in digital projects, some of which are at once civic and scholarly. Overall, however, the state humanities councils continue to operate within the inherited paradigm: the academic humanities are located in the disciplinary sphere of the university while the public humanities organizations recruit willing scholars for programs off campus.

Degree programs in public history and museum studies have been the exception that proves the rule. Their long-standing purpose has been to educate students who will “apply



their . . . skills . . . in public settings,” according to the current mission statement of the first public-history program, which opened at the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 1976 (“Public History”). For twenty-five years, these programs have prepared students for careers in nonacademic organizations. (Applied public humanities degree programs did not take hold in literary and language studies, and the question of why that is so would be a promising starting point for further inquiry into the history of the disciplines.) In recent years the effects of a worsening academic job market have stimulated fresh interest in professional studies in the humanities. In history, for example, association leaders are calling for departments to learn from public history programs: they should broaden the curriculum for all doctoral students by mainstreaming the public option right from the start rather than reserving it as a belated “Plan B” (Grafton and Grossman).<sup>3</sup>

Since the late 1990s, therefore, a different form of the public humanities has begun to take hold in colleges and universities. If this more recent model does not conform to the tradition of professional education in public history or museology programs, it is not antithetical to it, either. The new public humanities do not exclude nonacademic careers as a graduate student goal—far from it. But, for the most part, faculty members, graduate students, and undergraduates in the humanities who follow this approach are working across the academic-public boundary from the campus side. They are building a modest infrastructure for new public humanities with public scholarship at their core.

Outer-directed graduate programs aimed at preparation for nonacademic careers and these more recent public scholarship initiatives have a good deal in common. Like public history programs, new initiatives that make space for public scholarship attract students eager to acquire skills in collaboration, project development, public presentation,

and methodologies such as exhibition, ethnography, documentary, and place making. Publicly engaged scholars share the practical temper of, for example, public historians but often speak a different language. They draw on concepts like epistemological pluralism, agency, “principles of organization based in mutuality,” cultural identity theory, equity, and democracy in ways that tie them to different constituencies and lines of descent (Jay 19). They also are likely to partner with a more diverse set of organizations.<sup>4</sup>

### Locating the New Public Humanists

These concrete, programmatic changes on campus point to a robust challenge to the habitual academic-public binary in the humanities. I will begin with graduate students, for two reasons: first, because they are so often omitted from the discussion of changes in higher education, present as objects of concern but rarely as participating subjects; and, second, because they are among the pioneers of the new public humanities.

The language used to describe recently founded programs for graduate students shows that *public humanities* persists as a term for nonacademic humanities careers. This is true, for example, of the MA in Public Humanities at the John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage, at Brown University, which graduated its first class in 2007. The program’s stated goal is for its students to acquire “the knowledge and skills needed for jobs in museums, historical societies,” and other cultural agencies and community organizations (“M.A. Program”). Public Humanities at Yale, an MA program that offers a “concentration in Public Humanities en route to an American Studies doctorate,” emphasizes nonacademic pathways but is integrated into the doctoral program in ways that yield public-scholarship effects for students who are pursuing academic careers. Like the state humanities councils, the



program declares as its purpose to broaden “the concept of ‘audience’” by “expanding academic discourse beyond the confines of the classroom, academic publishing, and the academic conference circuit.” The emphasis on “building bridges to a wide range of local and regional institutions and their respective publics” echoes the language of the founding group of graduate student advocates.<sup>5</sup> While students “are prepared for public intellectual work” in the national arena of museums and documentary filmmaking, the public humanities here also comprise engagements close to campus (“Public Humanities: Yale”). Thus, although the Yale program is oriented to alternative careers,<sup>6</sup> it is also receptive to public scholarship. Most important, it is open to the agency of students. The active role played by graduate students in the creation of Yale’s program emphasizes who the new public humanists are rather than the question of what exactly public scholarship is.

The graduate students in the public humanities group at Yale are not alone. When I founded *Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life* (IA), a consortium of ninety colleges and universities now based at Syracuse University, I was determined to do something for graduate students. They were among the liveliest proponents of IA’s mission: to support artists and scholars whose work as civic professionals centers on publicly engaged scholarship and teaching. IA’s graduate-student-led program *Publicly Active Graduate Education* (PAGE) has shown just how generative national self-organizing by graduate students can be. Over a period of ten years, more than 150 graduate student public scholars in the humanities and related fields have run summits at IA annual meetings. Today these students are publishing, forming regional chapters, and meeting year-round through monthly conference calls.

While many students gravitate to PAGE because their unconventional public commitments make them feel marginalized in their

departments, some of them come because they are enrolled in graduate programs that are vigorously receptive to public scholarship and public creative practice. These certificate and degree programs are oriented to “critical work informed by matters of public salience” and prepare people for careers as “citizen humanists” on *or* off campus (Ellison and Eatanman 1; Davidson). The combined pursuit of advanced study and making knowledge with community partners is central to these students’ practice, which develops skills useful to nonacademic careers without offering defined career tracks. In these settings, *public humanities* means something like “publicly engaged but not necessarily nonacademic humanities.” Public scholarship programs speak to students who are already constructing identities as future “democratic professionals” on college campuses as well as to those who, facing the academic job search, want to diversify their professional portfolios or are curious about “what’s out there” (Dzur 271–73).

The most robust graduate program for the new public humanists is the Certificate Program in Public Scholarship, at the University of Washington’s Simpson Center for the Humanities. The certificate program was formed after six years during which the center, with important initial support from the Graduate School, offered an annual, weeklong public humanities institute for graduate students. As the institute’s founder, Kathleen Woodward, notes, it provided affective opportunities—a deliberate focus on “intellectual morale”—along with scholarly strategies: “new ways of imagining our scholarship as public goods, not just professional products, [gave] our graduate students a greater sense of meaning . . . a calling” (“Work-Work Balance” 995). These initiatives at the University of Washington have sought to cultivate the “diverse practices of community-based cultural research” and the efficacy of graduate students themselves (“Institute”). In fall 2013 a new doctoral program in Hispanic studies at the University



of Washington will admit its first students. They will be required to enroll in the Certificate Program in Public Scholarship, integrating the certificate into a doctoral program.

For students “pursuing careers within and outside higher education,” the Simpson Center promises self-development adequate to the rigors of “working across”—and the labors of crossing are present in its organizational syntax. The center’s Web site specifies the importance of offering its students the chance to develop the “capacity to imagine and enact collaborative cultural work across multiple sites inside and outside the university, and to represent their own aspirations and abilities as publicly engaged scholars” (“Institute”). The sheer number of times that *and* appears in these documents reveals the inelegant but urgent syntax of the aspiring public scholar: a syntax that performs a relational, locational identity lived both in and out of academe.

Motivated graduate students propel a number of similar programs that provide additional evidence of the trend to the new public humanities, resulting from “model and mission transfer” between campuses (Woodward, “Future” 114). Examples include the Arts of Citizenship Program, of the Rackham School of Graduate Studies, University of Michigan; the interdisciplinary MA in Cultural Studies, at the University of Washington, Bothell; the Graduate Institute on Public Engagement and the Academy, at the Obermann Center for Advanced Studies, University of Iowa; and the Public Humanities Exchange, of the Center for the Humanities, University of Wisconsin, Madison, which funds graduate student projects “convened outside the boundaries of academia” (“About Public Humanities Exchange”).

The public humanities have been a key ingredient in faculty-driven initiatives too, especially the formation of new humanities centers. A growing number of centers have *public* in their titles and speak of partnerships in their mission statements. For many faculty

members who are active in these humanities research units, the public humanities no longer mean simply public lectures, and interdisciplinarity takes extramural forms. These centers include Ohio State University’s Humanities Institute (founded in 1997); the Institute on Ethnicity, Culture, and the Modern Experience, at Rutgers University, Newark (1992); the Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts and Humanities, at Auburn University (1985); the Center for the Humanities and the Public Sphere, at the University of Florida (2000); the Center for New England Culture, at the University of New Hampshire, Durham (2002); and the University of Texas, Austin’s, Humanities Institute (2001). Collectively these centers have fostered an identifiable repertoire of public scholarship activities: collaborative projects; citywide events; multiyear campus-community projects; digital humanities projects; Teachers as Scholars programs;<sup>7</sup> conferences planned with regional partners, such as the Black New England conferences of the Center for New England Culture; “difficult dialogues” and other deliberative democracy events; and, at the University of Texas, Austin, sabbaticals for community members (Ellison, “This American Life” 4).<sup>8</sup>

### Naming the New Humanists

These developments show the new public humanities to be a hybrid, intersectional affair, an impression confirmed by how we refer to the people who are engaged in it, these new interstitial professionals. The complexities of naming point to the transformation of work identities as a central, if usually undeclared, purpose of public scholarship initiatives—a purpose that is as much a driver as the goal of changing the forms and content of scholarship. Publicly engaged scholars cannot be fitted to a single professional role or described in a single word. The hyphen is the telltale mark of public scholars, who, strikingly, do not call themselves “public humanists,” perhaps



because the term is still strongly associated with nonacademic careers. George Yúdice calls for an “archaeologist-practitioner” (337). The editors of *Museum Frictions* grapple with similar challenges of professional description: contributing authors “combine the roles of scholar, practitioner, and activist . . . and blur assumed divisions among the museum, the academy, and engaged social action” (Karp and Kratz 21). Sylvia Gale and Evan Carton, too, document unconventional professional descriptions: “‘service researchers’ (an anthropologist), ‘mutual actors’ (a landscape architect), ‘scholar-artist-citizens’ (a theater and dance scholar) or ‘scholarly activists’ (a communications professor)” (42). And when Kathleen Woodward asks, “What different terms do [contributors to an edited volume] deploy to describe themselves?” she answers, “Public scholar. Activist scholar. Scholar activist. Scholarly producer. Scholar-citizen. Scholar-advocate. Academic-activist. Public activist-scholar. Public intellectual” (“Future” 115–16).

The renegotiation of young humanities scholars’ identities, evident in these complicated acts of naming, is confirmed by studies of these cohorts. The Publicly Engaged Scholars study is part of an ongoing research program conducted by IA on the career aspirations of publicly engaged early-career scholars. Seventy-five percent of the almost five hundred survey participants responded that it was “important,” “very important,” or “extremely important” “to find a position after graduate school at a college or university that values publicly engaged scholarship” (Eatman, “Re-imagine” 7). The study confirms the both-and identities of publicly engaged scholars—their attachments to the academy and their impatience with its civic inhibitions. Participants were “as likely to value the traditional scholarly enterprise as they [were] to value social justice, public engagement and/or activism”—but the even balance between these two sets of values is telling (Eatman, *PES National Survey Result Summary*).<sup>9</sup>

Publicly engaged scholars are seeking more capacious professional identities that combine traditional and experimental elements. And the assertion that the new public humanities—and new public humanists—are plural or intersectional leads to a further conclusion. If the public humanities are “mixed,” if they mediate between one place and another and between one kind of practice and another, and if public humanists are also defined in terms of their hyphenated identities, then perhaps this area of the humanities has come to be defined positionally rather than as a complex of subjects and methodologies. The positional humanist is driving the new public humanities.

### Doing, Understanding, and Writing the Project

How do you do projects, understand organizations, and write about both as a positional humanist? We need to think more not only about what it means to do projects but also about what it means to engage in the close reading of projects and to author the writings that emerge from such reading. Reflecting on these questions is one mode of converting the public humanities into public scholarship.

My own version of epistemological pluralism has been fostered through fifteen years of experience with projects that involve words—spoken, performed, written, and drawn. These projects include *the 51st (dream) state / The America Project* (a five-year collaboration with the late poet and theater artist Sekou Sundiata); “Boomtown,” with the InsideOut Literary Arts Project, of Detroit; activities with teachers, school counselors, high school students, third graders, and staff members at parks and public libraries linked to courses called “Getting In: What College Means in America” and “The Poetry of Everyday Life”; and the Isithunzi Writing Workshop, which drew me to the question of the lyric visual gesture in the writing process of Johannesburg printmakers composing artist statements. During and long after



these projects, as a new public humanist who is also a literary historian, I have labored to craft a poetics of “the project” as the molecular unit of public work (“Lyric Citizenship” 92).

Practitioners of the new public humanities are producing books and essays that cannot be understood outside the conditions of collaborative production—direct, coequal involvement with living people and organizations. Such writings require the reader to attend closely to programmatic variables—overt or tacit—in the social biography of the text.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, these elements point to an emerging “cultural organizational studies” of and in the public humanities. As Yúdice notes, “[A]gency is never wholly one’s own; it requires working in a range of groups and organizations, at a moment when there are significant changes in how organizations understand knowledge and in how they desire democracy.” The operative words here are “range,” signaling a plurality of organizational encounters; “knowledge,” pointing to how learning works in and between organizations; and “desire,” underscoring the presence or absence of democratic intent as a defining feature of organizational life (157–58).

Dolores Hayden’s classic work of feminist urban studies, *Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, sets forth interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks and case studies of collaborative public projects that recovered the history of women of color in Los Angeles. Embedded in these case studies is a strong narrative of professional change. George Sanchez recalls the integrated but varied practices that flowed from a decade-long collaborative inquiry into the multiracial history of the Boyle Heights neighborhood: “a major museum exhibition, a teacher’s guide made free to all teachers, high school student radio projects, undergraduate and graduate research papers, and hopefully, within a year or so, my own next book” (qtd. in Ellison and Eatman 7). Tiya Miles’s *House on Diamond Hill* likewise incorporates the academic au-

thor’s own narrative of professional change. The goal of her book

is one of public engagement and information-sharing toward the end of co-constructing a sense of the past that enriches rather than limits communities; and the process of its becoming was one of spirited collaboration between university professors, college students, local researchers, and staff members as well as supporters of a state-operated historic site. (204)

Multiauthor volumes similarly register the altered relationships of the new public humanities. *Harriet Wilson’s New England* (2007), an outgrowth of the grassroots Harriet Wilson Project, in Milford, New Hampshire, edited by JerriAnne Boggis, Eve Allegra Raimon, and Barbara W. White, and *Civic Engagement in the Wake of Katrina* (2009), edited by Amy Koritz and George J. Sanchez, challenge the genre of the edited collection of academic essays. Authors include community historians, cultural activists, professors, archivists, poets, journalists, and high school teachers writing in a variety of genres, including poetry and memoir.

Finally, publicly engaged graduate students, like those invoked earlier in this essay, are writing dissertations that derive from their public scholarship. They help us to think concretely about the “ensemble of forms” that becomes possible in response to Sidonie Smith’s call for a “new dissertation.” For example, Joshua Lambier’s integrated understanding of the different arenas of his public work is fundamental to his dissertation. Lambier is a graduate student in English at Western University, in London, Ontario. His dissertation is on the Romantic era and human rights. He also was one of the rare humanists supported by the Trudeau Foundation, he found and attended the Rackham Public Humanities Institute, at the University of Michigan, and he launched a robust public humanities initiative, Public Humanities @ Western, staffed by graduate students and based in Western’s College of Arts and Humanities (Lambier). His



field scholarship and public scholarship form an integrated, manifold project.

### Sustaining the New Public Humanists

Scholarly legitimacy, supportive infrastructure, and cross-sectoral communities of practice are intermittent realities for public humanities scholars. To improve on this partial advance, new public humanists need to find pathways to “institutional agency.” “Agency is an option,” but it is not inevitable (Ellison and Eatman 19). Structured reflection at the departmental level on the latent public dimensions of each discipline; campus coalitions that join constituencies in humanities, arts, diversity, and outreach units; and tapping the resources of national networks like IA are three steps in this direction.<sup>11</sup> Above all, we need to exercise institutional agency to sustain people as well as programs.<sup>12</sup> We must take to heart the growing evidence that the desire to become a different kind of person is driving change in the humanities as much as the desire to work in a systemically engaged institution.

The new public humanists are struggling to balance normative academic identities and identities derived from intermediary positions between universities and other organizations.<sup>13</sup> Gale proposes changing the question from “Who will you be?” to “What do you need to fully activate the roles and the projects that really matter to you?” (325). Professional identities for public humanists increasingly require decisions about what projects to pursue and what organizations to work with. For it is in collaborative relationships that their complex roles take shape. Clearly, both programs and people are becoming oriented to a structurally distinct model of the public humanities—a humanities of, in, and between organizations—though on what scale we cannot yet tell.

### NOTES

1. Thomas Bender’s account of the rise of “disciplinary professionalism” in the postwar period traces the construction of national frameworks of validation in which academics’ professional identity was formed.

2. To ground these generalizations, we began that report with examples: the Keeping and Creating American Communities Project, in the Atlanta, GA, metropolitan area; the Free Minds Project, in Austin, TX; the Harriet Wilson Project, in Milford, NH; and ten more (vi–vii). Carolyn de la Peña’s discerning 2010 overview of engaged humanities projects points to Portland State University’s Humanities and Sustainability Research Project, the Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, and several others (4–5).

3. Anthony Grafton and Jim Grossman have offered “A Very Modest Proposal for Graduate Programs in History,” urging that history graduate programs open doors to the “many ways to apply what you’ve learned to a career.” This elicited a cautionary response from the editor of *Public Historian*: “the public historical workplaces they are counting on are being pushed to their own Plan Bs. . . . Historical museums, sites, archives, and research centers have faced public disinvestment as extreme as that afflicting the nation’s universities” (Bergstrom 8–9).

4. As new public humanities programs have been launched on university campuses, so too have civically engaged urban knowledge centers. Well-known examples include La Casa de la Raza, in Santa Barbara; Asian Immigrant Women Advocates, in Oakland; the Cultural Wellness Center, in Minneapolis; the Boggs Center, in Detroit; the August Wilson Center, in Pittsburgh; Project Row Houses, in Houston; and the Ashé Cultural Arts Center, in New Orleans. Each of these independent organizations has conceptual and practical frameworks that guide their relationships with academic collaborators, just as corresponding strategies guide campus programs in their relationships with community partners.

5. Public Humanities at Yale also houses faculty-initiated projects with a public focus, notably the Photogrammar Project, which is digitizing the Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information photographs.

6. Discussing programs like Yale’s, Leonard Cassuto says that “professors need to identify specific [nonacademic] employment goals for graduate students and work backward to structure a curriculum.”

7. In Teachers as Scholars programs, K–12 teachers “participate in small, multiple-day seminars led by leading professors in the Humanities, Social Sciences and Sciences and are, thus, reconnected to the world of scholarship,” while “university faculty become far more fully involved in the ongoing efforts of the schools” (“About TAS”).

8. At a few institutions, there are both a humanities institute and a public humanities center, reinforcing the supplemental or alternative status of the public humanities.



9. The research team used the data to construct “a typology of publicly engaged scholars” in the form of seven composite profiles. These profiles suggest narratives of professional identities learned through movement between roles or through commitments to more than one role at a time: e.g., the “Teacher to Engaged Scholar” is a “K–12 teacher . . . [who] enters the academy for graduate work and teaching, but remains committed to . . . schools,” and the “Engaged Interdisciplinary” works to leverage “every opportunity to borrow from different domains of inquiry for the enhancement of [his or her] community based work” (“Engaged Scholars”).

10. These texts also speak to the high transaction costs of collaborative projects, including uncertainty (“Will this project create beneficial change?”), stresses surrounding integration (“Will all the moving parts of this project—people, organizations, activities, resources—come together successfully?”), and urgency (“We’ve promised people that we will make something happen two months from now. Can we do it?” [Turner and Müller 2]). The project’s effortful, short-term nature is the basis for Jay’s recommendation that public scholarship programs turn short-term projects into long-term partnerships so that several faculty members and multiple cohorts of students can “work with the same partner over the years” (59).

11. Newfield argues that “culture . . . known through agency and action” includes the process of “developing . . . institutional agency” in and with organizations central to our work and our publics as one vital way of “binding . . . knowledge to democratized power” (157). His discussion of the relation between theory choice and institutional agency is especially provocative (144–45).

12. I agree with Gregory Jay that “activities not integrated with curriculum and enrollments are de-prioritized.” Jay is right to assert that campus-community projects and short-term programs are harder to sustain without reliable curricular links. After all, the aspirations of the public-minded graduate students I described earlier were likely shaped by their exposure to community-based learning as a “high-impact practice” in their undergraduate programs (Kuh). But public humanists need the curricular connection for reasons beyond mere sustainability: to build publicly active learning communities that nurture critical practice by both students and faculty members.

13. One of the most applicable close readings of how people acquire institutional agency in universities is Sturm’s account of “the architecture of inclusion.” Sturm analyzes the people who develop “role hybridity” and the programs that serve as “organizational catalysts” and “institutional intermediaries” around issues of gender equity in the sciences and engineering (56, 78, 80). Her arguments can be adapted to make a strong case for supporting the multiorganizational partnerships and plural identities of the new public humanists.

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# An Image of Europe: Yinka Shonibare's Postcolonial Decadence

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IN HIS 1891 DIALOGUE "THE DECAY OF LYING," OSCAR WILDE TURNS THE nineteenth-century love of realism on its head. As Vivian, one of his characters, remarks, art deals "with what is unreal and non-existent." It "is absolutely indifferent to fact, [it] invents, imagines, dreams, and keeps between herself and reality the impenetrable barrier of beautiful style, of decorative ideal treatment." Because life "imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life," Vivian concludes, the "final revelation is that Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of art" (*Artist* 320). If a world of "beautiful untrue things" sounds utopian, Wilde is unabashed, for "Progress," he argues elsewhere, "is the realisation of Utopias" (270). More than a century later, the Anglo-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare MBE echoes Vivian's sentiments: "people have a problem distinguishing artifice from so-called reality. Artifice is not reality; they are two different things. . . . For me it is about providing people with alternative possibilities and that sometimes requires the device of the lie" ("Setting" 43). Like Wilde, Shonibare believes that "[t]o be an artist," you not only "have to be a good liar," you also "have to be utopian in your approach. You have to create visions that don't actually exist yet in the world—or that may actually someday exist as a result of life following art" ("Yinka Shonibare" 28).

Born in London of Yoruba descent, raised in Lagos, Nigeria, and educated as a young adult in Britain, Shonibare might seem like an unlikely spokesperson for aestheticism. Yet in works such as his 2001 photographic series *Dorian Gray* and his 1998 series *Diary of a Victorian Dandy*, Shonibare casts himself in the leading role. His work reflects both his own transnational cultural affiliations and a larger institutional struggle in Britain to present a more "global" version of 'our island story,' as Stuart Hall puts it ("Whose Heritage?" 31).

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Shonibare describes his childhood in Lagos as typically middle-class: he spoke Yoruba at home and English in school and listened to Yoruba music but also drank Coca-Cola and watched *Hawaii Five-0* ("In Art" 25). In slyly aligning himself with the gatekeepers of British culture, however, "Shonibare infiltrates history and challenges ideas of [British] heritage" by presenting the story of Britain as "already cross-cut by new and old lateral connections and reciprocal global influences" (Khan 134; Hall, "Whose Heritage?" 31). In 2004 Shonibare was granted the title member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE). Other Commonwealth artists have refused the honor, but Shonibare ironically incorporates the title into his official artistic identity: it is "better to make an impact from within rather than from without," he argues; "it's the notion of the Trojan horse . . . you can go in unnoticed. And then you wreak havoc" ("Yinka Shonibare" 29).

For Shonibare, Wilde's antirealism serves as a Trojan horse that works in two directions, infusing nineteenth-century aestheticism with the politics of twenty-first-century global migration even as it challenges what Leela Gandhi calls "the constitutively modern demand for realism in politics" (146). The aestheticism associated with figures such as Wilde and Walter Pater, which drew on Charles Baudelaire, Théophile Gautier, and others, has received a bad rap in the twentieth century for "the element of late Victorian silliness about it" as well as its "apparent political indifference," its seeming refusal to be "*for* anything—history, politics, or morality, for instance," in favor of art for art's sake (Leighton 32–36). But as Angela Leighton argues, aestheticism's severest critics, Walter Benjamin among them, leave out "the extent to which Victorian aestheticism was almost always impure, . . . and beset by the very serious 'subject matter' it seems to avoid" (37). Moreover, as Regenia Gagnier observes, Wilde's aestheticism pushed back against the materialism of his age: "Art" was

the magical, fetishized term dandies deployed to replace the losses of the age of mechanical reproduction" (98). For Shonibare, aestheticism's built-in impurity, despite its pose to the contrary, renders it well suited for a renewed critique of the material conditions of twenty-first-century art. In privileging beauty over verisimilitude, Shonibare gets at the heart of the political questions that drive postcolonialism—migration, diaspora, displacement, exile, globalization, cultural hybridity, and so forth—paradoxically by way of the mixed-up history of aestheticism's apparent refusal of politics. By referring to this strategy as Shonibare's postcolonial decadence, I hope to evoke not only the aestheticism expressed in his playful references to the decadent movement in Europe but also the resonance the word *decadence* retained in Europe's colonies, as when the Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka describes a scene at the British residency in colonial Nigeria as "redolent of the tawdry decadence of a far-flung but key imperial frontier" (37). By fusing these far-flung elements of colonial decadence and European aestheticism, Shonibare invites a new understanding of *fin de siècle* decadence within a broader transnational framework, reinventing Wilde's antirealism for a globalized, postcolonial world.

At the same time, Shonibare's antirealist style reflects changes in the representation of black experience since the 1980s. According to Stuart Hall and Mark Sealy, practices based on the photojournalism of the 1960s and 1970s, which sought to counter negative stereotypes through a "strategy of 'positive imagery,'" "now seemed inadequate; and that in turn precipitated a critique of documentary realism and a decisive move towards the 'constructed image,'" producing "a new kind of cultural politics of representation" (15). Hall and Sealy argue that "the challenge to documentary notions of 'truth,' the critique of the photographic image as a classic 'realist' text, and of essentialist notions of identity and cultural nationalism, all led to a radical



break with the dominant mimetic tradition in photography” (16). This break enabled artists such as Shonibare to see identity as a “play of positions,” to take pleasure in “the artifice, the show, [and] the excess” of these new practices, and to use them to show how “in the colonial drama, distinctions between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’—the domestic and the imperial—are difficult to sustain” (65). In this vein, Shonibare’s work resonates with that of the Nigerian-born artist Iké Udé, whose ironic self-fashioning as a cover model for mock issues of *Cosmopolitan* and *GQ* suggests a dandyism “designed to undermine forever the claim of some ‘reality’ to stand outside of the ‘artifice’ of cultural performance in such a way as to constitute a critique of it” (49). For Shonibare, the break with documentary realism extends to his treatment of colonial history. His work suggests, as Wilde put it, that “the one duty we owe to history is to rewrite it” (*Artist* 359). In this sense, Shonibare keeps company with the Anglo-Nigerian poet Ber-

nardine Evaristo, who takes Wilde’s aphorism as the epigraph to her verse novel *The Emperor’s Babe*, an anachronistic reimagining of third-century Roman Britannia. Wilde’s maxim offers Shonibare an epigraph for his own revisions of Britain’s colonial history.

When Shonibare takes on colonialism, he often does so by Africanizing the “frivolous” activities of the Victorian leisure class, which reaped the spoils of empire, as in his 2000 work *Hound* (fig. 1) or his 2001 *Leisure Lady (with Pugs)* (fig. 2).<sup>1</sup> These works display several of Shonibare’s signature gestures: his use of headless mannequins to evoke the beheadings of the French Revolution, skin tones of indeterminate ethnicity, and, most striking, the use of Dutch wax print fabric, a product of the European textile industry that has become a symbol of “traditional” African culture, particularly in western Africa.<sup>2</sup> However, as many critics, including Nancy Hynes, have noted, Shonibare delights in the confused authenticity of the fabric:



FIG. 1

Yinka Shonibare  
MBE, *Hound*, 2000.  
Three life-size  
mannequins, four  
fiberglass dogs,  
one fiberglass fox,  
Dutch wax printed  
cotton, overall 960  
× 397 × 170 cm.  
Copyright the  
artist. Courtesy of  
the artist and the  
collections of Peter  
Norton and Eileen  
Harris Norton,  
Santa Monica.

FIG. 2

Yinka Shonibare  
MBE, *Leisure Lady*  
(with Pugs), 2001.  
Life-size mannequin,  
three fiberglass  
dogs, Dutch wax  
printed cotton,  
woman 160 × 80 ×  
80 cm, dogs 40 ×  
60 × 20 cm each,  
plinth 380 × 180 ×  
12 cm. Copyright the  
artist. Courtesy of the  
artist and Stephen  
Friedman Gallery,  
London. Collection  
of Jerome L. and  
Ellen Stern.

For Shonibare, the cloth is an apt metaphor for the entangled relationship between Africa and Europe and how the two continents have invented each other, in ways currently overlooked or deeply buried. The basic historical joke is that while the fabric . . . looks “African” and is of the sort often worn to indicate black pride in Brixton or Brooklyn, it is, in fact, printed fabric based on Indonesian batik, manufactured in the Netherlands, Britain, and other countries (including some in west Africa) and then exported to west Africa, where it is a popular, but foreign, commodity. The implication, then, is that nothing is as authentic as it may seem.<sup>3</sup> (Hynes 60)

In a further irony, the fabric’s European manufacturers deliberately employ European, not African, designers. Frans van Rood, head of

design for Vlisco, one of the chief distributors of these fabrics, describes their reasoning: “most Africans appreciate innovations that come from abroad, not those that come from within. . . . We interpret what we see in the African streets, and we see what our own imagination comes up with. We mix the two, and that provides for a constant process of creation and innovation that wouldn’t happen otherwise” (qtd. in Hobbs 29). “These popular simulacra,” Robert Hobbs observes, “are considered effective in providing contemporary Africans with a more compelling image of themselves than their own designers could” (29). By virtue of the material history of these fabrics, Shonibare’s insistence on “beautiful style” and “decorative ideal treatment” supports the ironic critique embedded in his works, a critique showing that the lifestyle of the Victorian elite was sustained by the colonial exploitation of Africa.

Rather than attempt to remove the mask of civility from the reality of empire, Shonibare prefers to reappropriate the mask itself. In his 2003 work *Scramble for Africa* (fig. 3), he reimagines a scene from the 1884–85 Berlin Conference, during which the delegates “carved up the continent for the European powers geometrically and with little regard for culture or ethnicity,” leaving “Africans torn by artificial political lines” (Hart 194, 196). In signing the documents of the accord, the fourteen powers effectively subordinated Africa, its peoples, and their separate histories to the history of Europe. Shonibare’s work makes no attempt to step outside this historical construct. Rather, he undermines what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls the “artifice of history” by creating a “real” scene that looks artificial, exposing how Europe’s version of







FIG. 3

Yinka Shonibare MBE, *Scramble for Africa*, 2003. Fourteen life-size fiberglass mannequins, fourteen chairs, table, Dutch wax printed cotton, overall 132 × 488 × 280 cm. Copyright the artist. Courtesy of the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London. Pinnell Collection, Dallas. Photo: Stephen White.

colonial history depended on a projection of Africa as unreal and inauthentic as these supposedly authentic “African” fabrics (27). By dressing these European diplomats in pseudo-traditional African garb, Shonibare installs an ironized “African” presence at the scene of a conference from which African representatives were entirely absent. He does so not by presenting a realistic counterhistory but by reconstituting Europe’s projections of its mastery out of the very fabric of its idealized image of Africa. In doing so, he takes Europe’s attempt to redraw the map of Africa, seen inlaid on the conference table (fig. 4), as material for redrawing the map of present-day transnational art, provincializing Europe’s acts of conquest within the decentered perspective of contemporary “cosmopolitan style.”<sup>4</sup> Shonibare deconstructs monocultural European accounts of colonial history by showing that the elements of “real”

historical accounts are always already fakes. Provocatively, however, his work suggests that counterclaims to represent a more authentic African reality would themselves be caught up in their own illusions.



FIG. 4

Detail of Yinka Shonibare MBE, *Scramble for Africa*, 2003. Photo: Stephen White.



Françoise Gaillard argues that “[c]ontrary to the *realist illusion* that takes pains to cover over all the marks of its fabrication in order to produce an effect of presence, of transparency of the real, *decadent imitation* underlines all the marks of trickery in order to accentuate the artificiality of the product.”<sup>5</sup> Shonibare’s decadent imitations, or, rather, his imitations of decadence, likewise embrace their own artificiality as a way of calling out the artificiality of empire. Shonibare’s contention that art must be separated from “*so-called reality*” suggests that reality, too, is never more than a construction. Wilde took this idea to its logical endpoint in the cul-de-sac of self-reflexivity: since the reality expressed in art is no less a construction than the artwork, “[a]rt never expresses anything but itself” (*Artist* 313). But, as Lawrence Danson asks, “if it were possible for art to be so thoroughly self-referential, would it have anything worthwhile to express?” (55). In answer, Danson argues that by undoing art’s mimetic relation to nature, Wilde hoped to make visible “new forms of human creation” (58–59). When Shonibare speaks of the capacity of the lie to present “alternative possibilities” or “fantasies of empowerment” (“Yinka Shonibare” 25), he aims to present new forms of human creation worthy of newly emergent global networks of human sociability. For Shonibare, the lie allows the artist to give shape to reality rather than reproduce its restrictions.

In this sense, Shonibare’s work offers an opportunity to rethink what Chakrabarty calls the “straightforward identification” in certain quarters of anticolonial thought “of the realist or the factual with the political” (150), a tendency that has produced what Leela Gandhi calls an “anti-aestheticist fallacy” (146).<sup>6</sup> Shonibare’s notion of “the lie” complicates this “disabling generic bias” not by evacuating the place of the real but by reorienting the political toward the unreal (Gandhi 147). For Stuart Hall, Shonibare represents just one case in which the turn from realism highlights

the difficulty of “finding ways of thinking about the relationship between the work and the world” without “projecting it into either a pure political space where conviction—political will—is all, or an inviolate aesthetic space, where only critics, curators, dealers and connoisseurs are permitted to play” (“Black Diaspora Artists” 23). “Fortunately,” Hall remarks, “the concepts which the diaspora arts deploy are actually *about* something—they have a content—and are not floating about in a passionless, self-referential void, entertaining only themselves” (22). And yet such passionless, contentless, self-referential voids have often been taken as the hallmark of decadence in art, or of literary exhaustion, marking the limit between aestheticist doctrine and the political. The challenge in reading Shonibare, then, is to understand how his evocation of the self-entertaining dandy, seemingly most at home in these self-referential voids, can also be *about* something, how his work’s connection to the world is constituted by its turn away from the real.

What I mean to argue here is not that such a rich and complex field as postcolonialism is biased toward or against realism in general.<sup>7</sup> Rather, I mean to emphasize the way in which Gandhi and Shonibare turn specifically to Wilde as an alternative resource for opening up the political possibilities of aestheticism within postcolonial thought. One of the problems Wilde’s aestheticism presents is the seeming “radical anti-historicism” that results from its insistence on art’s self-referentiality (Danson 56). For Gandhi, however, Wilde’s thinking “discloses its radical provenance precisely in its defiant flight from the realm of the real” (146). Gandhi uses the term “interested autonomy” to describe how Wilde’s insistence on art’s difference from the real is hardly politically neutral (161). Since, according to Wilde, nature imitates art, art that promotes “newness” and “difference” from the real holds the possibility of bringing reality along in tow. Wilde’s antirealism, Gan-



dhi argues, further reflects his cosmopolitan acceptance of the novel, the curious, and the different in general, as demonstrated by the dandy's "carefully cultivated taste for the exotic and foreign," a "xenophilia" that extended to Wilde's friendship with the young Indian poet Manmohan Ghose, for example, as well as his tastes in art (144). While Gandhi recovers the incipient politics of postcolonial difference in Wilde's life and work, Shonibare makes the anticolonial possibilities in Wilde's aestheticism manifest, relying on the apparent contradiction between aestheticism and political engagement to generate surprise and interest even as he deconstructs their opposition.

At the same time, the realist paradigm to which Gandhi refers has produced, among other things, a rich understanding of the geographic dimensions of aesthetic objects, an understanding that is necessary for unpacking the geographies of fin de siècle decadence and its postcolonial iterations. Edward Said argues, for example, that aesthetic objects become "more interesting and more valuable as works of art . . . because of their complex affiliations with their real setting"—that is, by virtue of their "worldliness" (*Culture* 13). The worldliness Said describes is far from unitary. Heterogeneous histories of modernity "derive from a discontinuous geography" (*Reflections* 466). For this reason, the critic must take account of "a new geographical consciousness of a decentered or multiply-centered world, a world no longer sealed within watertight compartments of art and culture or history, but mixed, mixed up, varied, complicated by the new difficult mobility of migrations, the new independent states, the newly emergent and burgeoning cultures" (471). By connecting artworks to their real, disparate geographies, the critic can make visible "disjunctive formations and experiences such as women's history, popular culture, post-colonial and subaltern material" (458). It is by tracing the disparate geographies of Wilde's aestheticism that Shonibare makes these disjunc-

tive formations visible in his own work. For Shonibare, Wilde's aestheticism has its own *worldliness*, a worldliness enhanced by its "complex affiliations" with its "real setting" and by its subsequent postcolonial reception.

Shonibare's works achieve historical depth not by conjuring history through a realist presentation of its facts but by meticulously imagining historical impossibilities that reveal hidden connections. They "give an accurate description," as Wilde puts it, "of what has never occurred" (*Artist* 349). Shonibare's fantastical reimaginations of Victorian England in African garb, for example, grasp the geographic contingency of historical formations by visually short-circuiting the colonial links between Europe and Africa. Likewise, Shonibare routes his *Dorian Gray* through several intervening uses of Wilde's novel. Here I argue that Shonibare's turn to Wilde puts a twist on the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe's critique of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, in which *The Picture of Dorian Gray* plays a pivotal role. Shonibare's return to Victorian London is further mediated by the Hollywood-produced images of London wrought in Albert Lewin's 1945 film for MGM *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, on which Shonibare's *Dorian Gray* is based. Shonibare's photographs respond as much to the political and sexual geographies of wartime London encoded in Lewin's film as they do to those of an earlier London encoded in Wilde's novel. Shonibare's Wilde is therefore multiple, mixed up, reflecting the disparate geographic and historical routes along which Wilde's work traveled in Europe, Africa, and America. And yet, like Wilde, Shonibare links the invention of otherness to local geographies of aesthetic experience. For this reason, Shonibare's recent work can be situated within postcolonial mappings of contemporary London. If Shonibare locates his work in the hothouse of decadent aesthetics, that hothouse belies a worldliness that is surprisingly global in reach. At the same time, the multiple routes by which

Wilde enters Shonibare's work demonstrate the continuing relevance of Wilde's antirealism at the point where the limits of empire intersect with the limits of representation.

In his 1977 essay "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," Achebe explores where these limits meet in fin de siècle modernism, providing a foundational moment from which Shonibare departs. Achebe takes Conrad to task for portraying Europe as refined and civilized while portraying Africa as "the other world,' the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked" (252). Achebe faults Conrad's impressionistic style for reducing African speech to an "uncouth babble of sounds" and the Congolese people to a "glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs" (Conrad, qtd. in Achebe 255, 253). For Achebe, the problem is not just that Conrad portrays Africans as a blur of sound and image but that he does so while pretending to write in a realist mode: "When a writer while pretending to record scenes, incidents and their impact is in reality engaged in inducing hypnotic stupor in his readers through a bombardment of emotive words and other forms of trickery much more has to be at stake than stylistic felicity" (253). What F. R. Leavis calls Conrad's "adjectival insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery" "must not be dismissed lightly . . . as a mere stylistic flaw," Achebe argues, "for it raises serious questions of artistic good faith" (253).

While Achebe's claims have been hotly debated, what concerns me here is the way Achebe reinforces the link between Conrad's stylistic excess and his bad faith by portraying Conrad as a decadent. Indeed, none of the experimental modes associated with the European fin de siècle—impressionism, symbolism, primitivism—fare well with Achebe. For him, Conrad's intensely subjective impressionism, which deepens, in Michael Lev-

enson's words, a late Victorian "withdrawal of subjectivity from the realm of fact," paradoxically denies the subjectivity of the non-European (16). Likewise, by brushing aside Conrad's evocation of "inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery," Achebe revives a typically high-modernist dismissal of symbolist mystification, attributing such decadent tendencies to the decline of empire. As Levenson observes, "Whereas Mallarmé had written that 'To *name* the object is to destroy three-quarters of the enjoyment of the poem . . .' Pound would bluntly remark that, 'when words cease to cling close to things, kingdoms fall, empires wane and diminish'" (110–11; ellipsis in orig.). Throughout the essay, Achebe systematically cancels Conrad's image of Africa as bestial, primordial, backward, and barbaric. At the same time, though, he reinforces Conrad's image of Europe as overly refined, artificial, psychologically perverse, and senescent. He argues that Conrad's stylistic excess, like Gauguin's primitivism or Picasso's use of African masks, can be seen as an attempt to infuse "new life into European art, which had run completely out of strength" (260). Only by reattaching words to things, or, rather, to people, Achebe implies, can one successfully counter the racist consequences of an egocentric impressionism, an incomprehensible symbolism, and a last-ditch primitivism, by means of a more socially responsible realism.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that to make his point about the decadence of Conrad's fin de siècle English novel, Achebe turns to the leading example of British decadence, Oscar Wilde, and his novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*:

For reasons which can certainly use close psychological inquiry the West seems to suffer deep anxieties about the precariousness of its civilization and to have a need for constant reassurance by comparison with Africa. If Europe, advancing in civilization, could cast a backward glance periodically at Africa trapped in primordial barbarity it could say



with faith and feeling: There go I but for the grace of God. Africa is to Europe as the picture is to Dorian Gray—a carrier onto whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate. Consequently Africa is something to be avoided just as the picture has to be hidden away to safeguard the man's jeopards integrity. Keep away from Africa, or else! Mr. Kurtz of *Heart of Darkness* should have heeded that warning and the prowling horror in his heart would have kept its place, chained to its lair. But he foolishly exposed himself to the wild irresistible allure of the jungle and lo! the darkness found him out. (261)

Achebe argues, in essence, that *Heart of Darkness* is a decadent text, that under the mask of Kurtz's colonial adventurism lies Dorian Gray's narcissistic self-delusion. Achebe uses *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to turn *Heart of Darkness* into a mirror reflecting Europe's anxiety about its own artistic, literary, psychological, and cultural decline. For Achebe, Europe's attempt to displace its fears of degeneration onto Africa constitutes the chief symptom of a decadence well under way. While Achebe criticizes Conrad for casting Africa as a "place of negations," by invoking Wilde Achebe casts Europe as a place of self-negation, placing Europe's illusions in a kind of self-reflexive quarantine (251). By detaching European modes of representation from Africa, Achebe allows another term, reality, to appear in their absence. In doing so, he remaps the aesthetic relation between Europe and Africa as the opposition between decadent illusion and an emergent realism.

In an unexpected way, Achebe forges a strategic alliance with Wilde, an avowed foe of realism, to denounce Conrad for failing to live up to his realist pretensions. I think there is a reason for this. Said argues that "Conrad's self-consciously circular narrative forms draw attention to themselves as artificial constructions, encouraging us to sense the potential of a reality that seemed inaccessible to im-

perialism, just beyond its control" (*Culture* 29). Achebe faults Conrad for a kind of representational bait and switch: Conrad offers a view into a world to which he then systematically denies access. Wilde, however, makes no claim to represent such realities, so he gets off the hook for not offering more than he can deliver. Wilde's artificiality, then, is distinguished from Conrad's only by the degree to which it is flaunted, and disagreements about how well Conrad advertises *his* artificiality form the substance of the debate over his good faith as a critic of empire. Achebe employs Wilde's flamboyant aestheticism to make this distinction visible. This leaves Wilde in a curiously Janus-faced position. Though Achebe unmasks Conrad as a decadent by reference to Dorian Gray, he positions Wilde relative to Conrad as a model of artistic good faith, a stylistic trickster who openly avows his trickery. For Achebe, Wilde's decadence cuts both ways: it signifies Europe's cultural decadence, as manifest in Conrad's racially inflected stylistic excesses, while at the same time, because Wilde proclaims the distance between art and reality, he provides the "words, the very tools of possible redress," that Achebe takes up to disrupt what he sees as the blind acceptance of Conrad's racism (262).

"The Decay of Lying" illustrates how Wilde's self-conscious antirealism may prove more congenial to Achebe's thinking, and to anticolonial thought, than does Conrad's egocentric impressionism, though Wilde's particular brand of orientalism presents its own problems:

No great artist ever sees things as they really are. If he did, he would cease to be an artist. . . . Now, do you really imagine that the Japanese people, as they are presented to us in art, have any existence? If you do, you have never understood Japanese art at all. The Japanese people are the deliberate self-conscious creation of certain individual artists. . . . In fact the whole of Japan is a pure invention. There is no such country, there are no such people. (*Artist* 315)

The proposition that “[t]here is no such country, there are no such people” is deliberately shocking; it hangs precariously on the qualification “as they are presented to us in art.” Yet Wilde’s stipulation speaks to more than the referential content of Japanese painting; it speaks to the referential status of the art object itself. Said argues that for many nineteenth-century writers “a generalization about ‘the Orient’ drew its power from the presumed representativeness of everything Oriental; each particle of the Orient told of its Orientalness, so much so that the attribute of being Oriental overrode any countervailing instance” (*Orientalism* 231). Wilde contravenes the (Far Eastern) orientalism of his era by denying the “representativeness” of Japanese, or any, artwork. He insists that no generalizations are possible beyond the particular vision of the individual artist and that no particular artwork can stand in for a whole culture.

Wilde then attempts to legitimate an alternative use of foreignness in artwork to produce localized aesthetic effects. By studying Japanese art closely, he suggests, one sets about reinventing London:

[I]f you desire to see a Japanese effect, you will not behave like a tourist and go to Tokio. On the contrary, you will stay at home, and steep yourself in the work of certain Japanese artists, and then, when you have absorbed the spirit of their style, and caught their imaginative manner of vision, you will go some afternoon and sit in the Park or stroll down Piccadilly, and if you cannot see an absolutely Japanese effect there, you will not see it anywhere. (315–16)

Here Wilde limits the geography of antirealist fantasy to one’s local experience. The production of artistically “Japanese” effects begins at home and is realized in *flâneurship*: strolling through a city park or around Piccadilly Circus. The *flâneur* fantasizes about geographically distant territory, as presented in art, only to knowingly remap his fantasies within the immediate vicinity.

For Wilde, such fantasies become essential features of the experience of urban modernity in Europe, particularly in cities like London, where one might have access, as Wilde did, to Japanese art or books on the subject (Frankel 69n5). Indeed, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* opens with Lord Henry enjoying a “momentary Japanese effect” produced by the shadows of birds on an elegant silk curtain, an effect that contrasts with “the dim roar of London,” which sounds “like the bourdon note of a distant organ” (5). It is only through the decentering experience of a Japanese effect that the dim roar of urban life becomes noticeable at all. The modern city dweller makes and unmakes urban experience by imagining “foreign” and “domestic” effects in tandem: the “real” London, the London indexed by its dim roar, is no less an effect produced in the imagination of otherness than the shadows on the curtain. A Japanese effect produces a London effect.

Shonibare’s *Dorian Gray* compounds and complicates such effects, reimagining twenty-first-century Britain by way of African diasporic experience. In the first scene (fig. 5), Lord Henry, in top hat at the right, gazes over the artist Basil Hallward at the portrait of Dorian, a likeness of Shonibare. The image preserves some sense of the division in Achebe’s critique of Conrad: the white European dandy, Lord Henry, stands masterful and erect, gazing at a picture of an African that, by the logic of the novel, will wither and corrupt over time. However, if Achebe’s analogy—that in Western art Africa is to Europe as the picture is to Dorian Gray—holds true, then Shonibare, by laying claim to a hybrid, Afro-European identity and casting himself in the role of Dorian, doubles the terms on both sides. When Dorian later gazes on his own picture, an Afro-European will be looking back at the face of an Afro-European. If this Dorian inhabits a double geo-cultural identity, then by the logic of the analogy he should exhibit a double moral identity. Rather





FIG. 5

Scene 1 of Yinka Shonibare MBE, *Dorian Gray*, 2001. Eleven black-and-white resin prints, one color digital Lambda print, each 122 × 152.5 cm unframed, 134 × 165 cm framed. Copyright the artist. Courtesy of the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London. Collection of Emily Fisher Landau, New York.

than divvy up perfection and corruption between Europe and Africa, the culturally hybrid Dorian ought to embody both features. As Shonibare's series progresses, he does exactly that.

In Wilde's novel and Lewin's film, Dorian notices the contrast between his perfectly preserved body and the degenerating portrait increase over time. Only when Dorian destroys the picture and himself does he come to embody the grotesque record of his immoral behavior. In a subtle departure from Wilde's narrative, Shonibare never actually shows such a temporal division between person and portrait. Rather, Shonibare's Dorian physically exhibits both Dorian's perfection and his degeneration.<sup>8</sup> In scene 2 (fig. 6), we see Dorian, dressed in black tie, gazing at his own image not in the portrait but in a mirror, echoing a similar scene in Lewin's film. Scene 10 (fig. 7) depicts a living Dorian at his

most grotesque, gazing into the same mirror. In this, the only scene in color, we can see the withering of Dorian's hair and skin from behind as well as in the mirror. In Lewin's film, the only two scenes in color show the portrait once at the moment it is finished and once again for shock value at the finale. Shonibare alters this later Technicolor moment to reveal not the supernatural degradation of the painting but Dorian's embodiment of his own moral degeneracy. Shonibare depicts the Afro-European subject as both immaculately youthful and marred by corruption.

While Achebe deploys Wilde's novel to expose Europe's image of Africa as a projection of Europe's own internal corruption, Shonibare indicates that the African subject exhibits these internal divisions as well. Both sides maintain images of their own mastery; both project images of their own corruption onto the other. Africa's duality mirrors

FIG. 6

Scene 2 of Yinka Shonibare MBE, *Dorian Gray*, 2001.



Europe's, and the hybrid, Afro-European subject claims the best and worst of both worlds. Where Achebe clears a space for African realities to emerge, Shonibare fills that space again with decadent artifice. Realism drops out of the equation as Shonibare's work insists that Africa and Europe must each work through its own illusions. For Shonibare, this presents an opportunity. If the picture of corruption returns to the African side of the equation, this allows Shonibare to lay claim to the ability to remake his own image just as the European dandy can. Shonibare's work suggests that this will to artifice may be more desirable for the contemporary postcolonial subject than any effort to establish stricter principles of historical realism would be.

Shonibare confirms this position in an interview with Anthony Downey. Downey questions whether Shonibare intends his use of the figure of the black dandy in *Diary of*

*a Victorian Dandy* to be "seen as a moment of historical revisionism—a moment of going back in time and pointing out that Victorian society was not as mono-cultural as we think it was." Shonibare resists Downey's interpretation on aestheticist grounds:

I would not necessarily go with that reading. . . . It is not about expressing something that once existed but people do not know about. The images in *Diary of a Victorian Dandy* are fakes—it is pure theatre and it is Yinka Shonibare in that picture, not some obscure historical character. It is a contemporary person doing this and it is playing with this idea of making people look twice and re-engage in what they are looking at. ("Setting" 43)

Shonibare can comfortably dismiss the reading Downey proposes because the realist reading that elaborates on the worldliness of the artwork has become the expected read-



ing. By asking the question, Downey does part of Shonibare's work for him, leaving him free to deny the work's historical connections while emphasizing its aesthetic effect, "making people look twice." By evading Downey's suggestions, Shonibare brings the viewer's experience into the present moment. Just as Wilde argues that steeping oneself in the art of a distant time and place (Japan, ancient Greece, etc.) reshapes one's perceptions of the immediate surroundings, Shonibare's work can be understood to revisit Victorian London in order to reshape perceptions of contemporary "black Britain."

To better understand how this works, we have to return to the 1945 film version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, on which Shonibare's work is based. Released two months before Germany surrendered to the Allies, the film presents an idealized image of prewar England that contrasts sharply with images of

London after the Blitz. The film plays the well-preserved dandy to the picture of war-torn Europe presented in newsreels. And yet the film is shot through with a desperate urge to find transcendence in the ruin. Shonibare revises and inverts the film's curious relation to its historical moment, adding historical and geographic dimensions to his 2001 *Dorian Gray* that cannot be explained by reference to Wilde's novel alone.

While no German bombers roar across the sky in Lewin's film, the film's image of London seems subject to an invasion of another sort, that of an encroaching Eastern spiritualism. This invasion begins in the opening credits with an epigraph from Edward FitzGerald's translation of *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* on the duality of the soul (fig. 8) and continues throughout the film as myriad oriental artworks rapidly overrun Dorian's stately English townhouse.



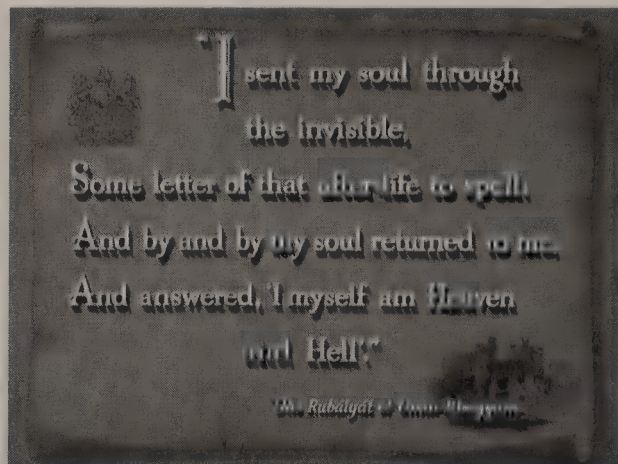
FIG. 7

Scene 10 of Yinka Shonibare MBE, *Dorian Gray*, 2001.



FIG. 8

Frame from Albert  
Lewin, dir., *The  
Picture of Dorian  
Gray*, 1945.



Of course, Wilde's novel features no lack of oriental bric-a-brac. As Urmila Seshagiri observes, Dorian's "worship of cosmopolitan and racially hybrid art transforms his Grosvenor Square house into an extravagant and fully global display of ancient, medieval, and modern artistry" (37). But the novel takes its time recounting Dorian's promiscuous collecting habits, picked up partly from his reading of the "poisonous book" Lord Henry gives him (107). The practice demonstrates the means by which Dorian relocates "his racial consciousness from the linear ties of familiar genealogy to the domain of literature" (Seshagiri 37), as when Dorian realizes that "one had ancestors in literature, as well as in one's own race" (122). In the film, art objects begin to appear at random, as if by their own volition. While Hurd Hatfield plays Dorian as a nearly expressionless cipher who suppresses any visible hint of his internal struggle, his home becomes a battlefield on which mysterious spiritual forces from the East (Hindu gods, bodhisattvas, etc.) war with the sensuous materialism of Western decadence.

The charge appears to be led by a magically endowed Egyptian cat-god figurine (fig. 9). In a departure from Wilde's novel, the film attributes Dorian's mystical preservation to the cat's powers. Early on, Lord Henry warns Dorian that the cat is "one of the seventy-three great gods of Egypt and quite capable of granting your wish." As the film progresses, the cat ominously dominates

the foreground of shot after shot. In another departure from the novel, Hallward urges Buddhism on Dorian as an antidote to his spiritual ills, offering Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia* (1879), a long narrative poem detailing the life of Buddha, as a remedy for the influence of the notorious yellow book modeled on J.-K. Huysmans's *À rebours*. The film's mid-century orientalism harks back to that of Wilde's era. J. Jeffrey Franklin notes, for example, how human figures from the Orient "lurk at the margins of many Victorian texts" as "signs of a process of cultural transformation underway in Britain as an unforeseen byproduct of the counter-invasion to which empire opened the doors" (8). The same holds true in the film for Dorian's collectibles. Read as a document of the final days of World War II, Lewin's film betrays war-torn Britain's sense of vulnerability by recapitulating Victorian fears of reverse colonization.

At the same time, Hallward's Buddhist evangelism implies that in the wake of Europe's spiritual and moral collapse, redemption lies to the east. Broken and vulnerable, the West can only be made whole by opening



FIG. 9

MGM publicity still  
for *The Picture of  
Dorian Gray*, 1945.



itself up further. Hallward's prodding suggests he believes that Eastern spiritualism might cure Dorian of his unhealthy, opium-laced cosmopolitanism. Hema Chari points out that it was by forcing the opium trade on India and China that the British could demonize the East as sickly and decadent (215). Fittingly, just as the British displaced onto the Orient the origins of a decadence they themselves produced, in Lewin's film it is only through Eastern religion that Dorian can restore an English sense of vigor. As Lord Henry tells Dorian, "Nothing can cure the soul but the senses, just as nothing can cure the senses but the soul" (23). That is, only by indulging in one cosmopolitanism can Dorian cure himself of the effects of another. This leaves Englishness a continually displaced phenomenon, an object always placed out of reach by warring cosmopolitanisms.

Jessica Feldman highlights how attempts to account for the advent of dandyism often begin in such geographic displacements:

[F]or the French, dandyism is an English phenomenon, an import. For stylish Londoners, "la mode," Parisian style, must set the standard. This international proliferation of dandyism suggests the very displacement crucial to "placing" dandyism: it exists in its purest form always at the periphery of one's vision, often in a foreign language or a text requiring decipherment. (2)

In Monica L. Miller's account, the long tradition of black dandyism to which Shonibare belongs begins with the displacements of the slave trade and indexes a "cosmopolitanism that African subjects did not choose but from which they necessarily reimagined themselves" (6). Shonibare's use of African fabrics likewise trades on an African identity glimpsed through the eyes of European designers. For this reason, it is all the more surprising that Shonibare strips his re-created *Dorian Gray* of any of the visual references to the Orient that proliferate throughout Lewin's

film. Rather, Shonibare seems to select his scenes for their quintessential Englishness: a pub, a day in the park, two scenes in the London fog, a hunting scene, and so on. His interiors are devoid of any oriental statuary that might break up the monocultural homogeneity of the setting. By removing the East Asian, South Asian, and Egyptian iconography from Lewin's film, Shonibare heightens the contrast between his own presence as black dandy and the background image of white, Victorian London. In swapping the threat of reverse colonization from one corner of the empire for that from another, Shonibare enacts not one but two substitutions: the black dandy substitutes for the white, and an oppressive Englishness substitutes for an oppressive orientalism. Shonibare's work indicates that whether or not Victorian London was a historically multicultural cosmopolis, this work of art known as *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in each of its iterations by Wilde, Lewin, and Shonibare, has always been a (differently) multicultural invention, a work best glimpsed through its ever-changing visions of the imperial periphery.

Shonibare identifies with the figure of the dandy as "an outsider," he says, "whose only way in is through his wit and his style." The dandy's "frivolous lifestyle is a political gesture of sorts, containing within it a form of social mobility. Needless to say, Oscar Wilde is a good example of the dandy and he played that role well; he used his wit and his style to progress within English society and was brutally penalised in the end for his apparent frivolity." Speaking as "a black man living in the U.K.," Shonibare observes that Wilde's "apparent lack of seriousness of course belied an absolute seriousness and that attracts me to the dandy as a figure of mobility who upsets the social order of things" ("Setting" 42).<sup>9</sup> Wilde, of course, was convicted not of frivolity but of "gross indecency." How then does Wilde's status as a queer Irishman relate to Shonibare's depiction of Dorian as a racial and cultural

outsider, a figure of global and transnational, not just gender and sexual, mobility?

Miller remarks that Shonibare curiously evades the subject of homosexuality in *Dorian Gray*:

Nowhere is the sexuality depicted in *Diary of a Victorian Dandy*, in Wilde's story, and in Lewin's film in evidence in this series; it is empty of any scenes of charged assignations between Dorian and Sybil or of homoerotic banter between Lord Henry, Basil, or Dorian. Shonibare empties out the queer content of one of the English language's most prototypically queer texts. (286–87)

While the homoeroticism of Wilde's novel might seem plain to readers today, it is important to remember how careful his publishers were to avoid making the novel's allusions to homosexuality too explicit (Frankel 1–64). Likewise, a 1945 poster for Lewin's film (fig. 10) promotes the story partly as a heterosexual romance (see the foreground inset) and partly as a

bodice-ripping potboiler (the middle-ground tagline reads, "Why did women talk about Dorian Gray in whispers?"), confining any homoerotic undertones to the background (note James Vane pressing a knife to Dorian's chest under a streetlamp). The cluster of images is enticingly underlined with a salacious warning: "SUITABLE ONLY FOR ADULTS." To my eye, Shonibare has not evacuated the sexuality found in Lewin's film and Wilde's novel from his *Dorian Gray* so much as he has encoded it using the same terms as these earlier works.

Scenes 6 and 7 (figs. 11 and 12), for example, depict an episode in which Dorian pretends not to recognize Hallward on a foggy street. The images echo the visual vocabulary of gay male street cruising in an era of legal repression: the risky exchanges of glances and casual conversation, chance encounters that could lead to a sexual tryst, misunderstandings and violence, or arrest by decoy police officers. Quentin Crisp's memoir of mid-twentieth-century gay life in London, *The Naked Civil Servant*, renders many such scenes and their varying outcomes. Crisp's account of the war years, particularly relevant to the era of Lewin's film, describes the sexual dangers and opportunities brought out by the Blitz. During the blackouts, when Londoners dimmed their lights to avoid becoming easy targets for German bombers, anything could happen:

For most of 1940 London by night was like one of those dimly lit parties that their hosts hope are slightly wicked. . . . As soon as the bombs started to fall, the city became like a paved double bed. Voices whispered suggestively to you as you walked along; hands reached out if you stood still and in dimly lit trains people carried on as they had once behaved only in taxis. (149)

The ambiguity of the meeting in Shonibare's pair of images—the absent context and content of the conversation and Hallward's subsequent backward glance—could easily signify two ships passing in the night or a prelude to an erotic encounter.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, in the next scene (fig. 13), Dorian is placed immediately behind Hallward in a suggestively homoerotic position, on the verge of committing penetration with a knife. The following scene (fig. 14) shows Dorian distanced from his British peers, allegorizing Wilde's own ostracism from British society after the exposure of his sexual conduct. Miller, I suggest, mistakes ambiguity for absence, missing the diminished visibility and plausible deniability

FIG. 10

Promotional poster for *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 1945.





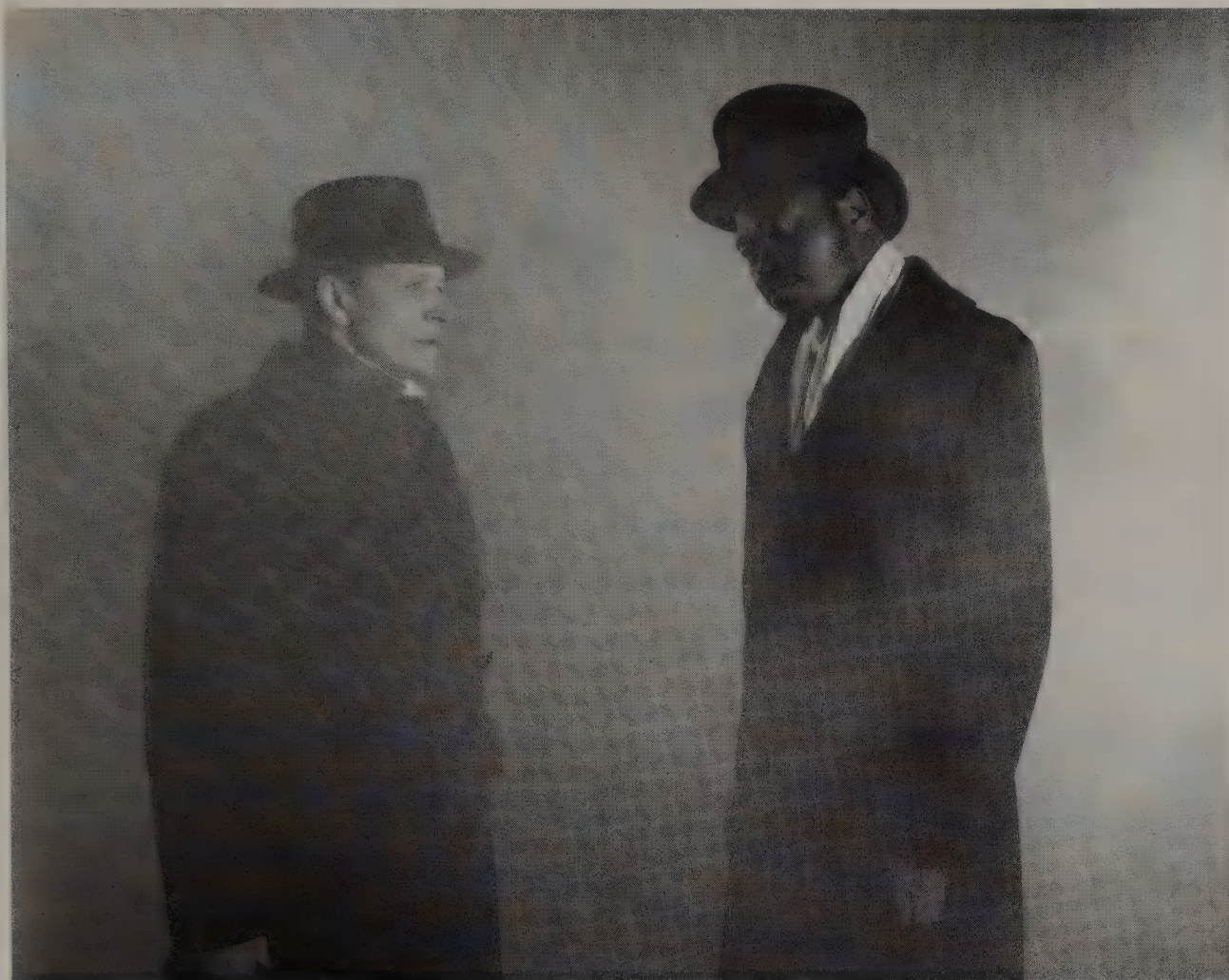


FIG. 11

Scene 6 of Yinka Shonibare MBE, *Dorian Gray*, 2001.

that were often the condition of homosexual encounters after Wilde's trial and well into the war years, when Lewin's film was released.

Tellingly, in Wilde's original typescript for the 1890 version of the novel, Dorian can similarly be found wandering "dimly-lit streets." He even gets cruised: "A man with curious eyes had suddenly peered into his face, and then dogged him with stealthy footsteps, passing and repassing him many times" (Frankel 146). This sentence, along with numerous other suggestions of homosexual activity in Wilde's typescript, was canceled by Wilde's editor at Lippincott's (Frankel 47, 146). Such cancellations serve as reminders of the diminished visibility and plausible deniability that were the preconditions for *The Picture of Dorian Gray*'s publication as well.

I would argue, then, that if Shonibare is imprecise about the cause of Wilde's punishment, attributing it to Wilde's "frivolity," his

imprecision shows an open-ended identification in his work between various outsider positions: queer, Irish, Eastern, African, imprisoned, exiled, black, diasporic. To sum up all these precarious and potentially subversive positions as "frivolous" is to show how the dandy's expertise at self-invention enables multiple remappings of British identity by its internal "outsiders" ("Setting" 42–43). If the metropolitan dandy is best glimpsed at the periphery of one's vision, Shonibare suggests that the European metropolis itself can be seen only in glimpses of its imperial and sexual peripheries, that to "place" London is to be caught up in the same series of geographic and gender displacements that define the spirit of dandyism. Shonibare's use of the dandy reveals that, like the "dim roar" that Lord Henry notices only after glimpsing a "Japanese effect," London itself is an effect of one's "peripheral" vision, in all senses of the term.



FIG. 12

Scene 7 of Yinka  
Shonibare MBE,  
*Dorian Gray*, 2001.



In this manner, Shonibare's *Dorian Gray* calls up the discontinuous colonial and sexual geographies that give shape to Wilde's story in each of its iterations in 1890, 1945, and 2001. In Lewin's film, however, the colonial presence remains physically peripheral to the protagonist, a matter of decor. Otherness belongs more to the film's objects than to its subjects. By casting himself in the role of Dorian, Shonibare inverts this relation between center and periphery, casting the colonial subject at the heart of the metropolis as the central actor in Britain's drama of self-definition. Like Hatfield's Dorian, Shonibare's Dorian is a blank slate. Yet Shonibare's Dorian is set upon not by oriental mysticism but by the invading forces of Englishness all around him, pressing in on him like the London fog. To survive, the African subject, like Dorian's Irish author, becomes the quintessential Englishman, a dandy more English than the English.<sup>11</sup>

In Wilde's novel, Lord Henry observes how by becoming an artist one becomes foreign: "Even those that are born in England become foreigners after a time, don't they? It is clever of them, and such a compliment to art. Makes it quite cosmopolitan, doesn't it?" (40–41). As Seshagiri observes, "Lord Henry's witticisms describe an aesthetic-racial cycle that powerfully shapes the originality of Dorian's life: artistic expression transfigures the racial character of artists, who then, from their newfound roles as 'foreigners,' make art itself 'quite cosmopolitan'" (33). Shonibare's work demonstrates that the process of becoming English, even for an artist born in London such as himself, can be a process of becoming foreign.

Shonibare's *Dorian Gray* thus reflects the experience of migrant artists from across the globe as they come to terms with their sense of Britain's foreignness. It is Britain's sense of foreignness to itself, however, that Shonibare





FIG. 13

Scene 8 of Yinka  
Shonibare MBE,  
*Dorian Gray*, 2001.

captures in his most prominent public work, his re-creation of Admiral Nelson's *HMS Victory* as a ship in a bottle. Unveiled in May 2010 as part of a series of "Fourth Plinth" exhibits, this paradoxically huge "miniature" poked fun at the monumentality of Nelson's column in Trafalgar Square (fig. 15).<sup>12</sup> Sporting sails of Dutch wax print fabric (fig. 16), *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* not only draws attention to the multiculturalism of contemporary London and to the colonial relation between Europe and Africa, it draws Britain's celebrated projection of naval dominance inward (Wilkes). Shonibare's ship in a bottle invokes the decadent trope of the hothouse flower, a figure of delicate subjectivity capable of surviving only under a bell jar. The work evokes Dorian's practice of collecting exotic specimens from colonial territory, setting off a symbol of British conquest as one among

any number of curios in some decadent's collection. The work seals itself in one of those "watertight compartments of art" that Said warns about, and yet it shows the "mixed up" mobility of postcolonial London within the airtight space of the antirealist artwork. Even as it draws ironic attention to Britain's dominion overseas, in reshaping Trafalgar Square as a multiculturally conscious public space it recalls the vessel in Wallace Stevens's "Anecdote of the Jar" that "took dominion everywhere." This ship in a bottle thus provides an apt figure for Gandhi's notion of interested autonomy, sealed off from reality yet able to reshape the reality all around it.

While glimpses of the colonial periphery are central constituents of even the most decadently self-reflexive aestheticism, Shonibare's work helps make visible the ways in which decadence floats at the periphery of

FIG. 14

Scene 9 of Yinka Shonibare MBE, *Dorian Gray*, 2001.



postcolonialism in its displacement of aestheticism from the colony to the imperial center. By inverting this relation between insider and outsider, Shonibare demonstrates how aestheticism, even in its most decadent forms, may become central to postcolonial imaginings of the “real.”

## NOTES

I would like to thank Yinka Shonibare MBE for kindly providing permission to reprint his work; Rachel Assaf, James Green, and the Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, for helping me obtain images; and the many readers who had a hand in developing this article.

1. Shonibare, “Setting” 41; see also Miller 271.

2. Shonibare’s allusion to guillotined aristocrats “started as a joke,” he recalls: “It’s witty in a knowing sort of way. It adds more ambivalence” (Shonibare, “In Art” 26). See also Hobbs 33.

3. See also Picton 68–72; Miller 271–72.

4. “Europe” here is “an imaginary figure that remains deeply embedded in *clichéd* and *shorthand* forms in some everyday habits of thought” (Chakrabarty 4). For “cosmopolitan style,” see Walkowitz 2.

5. “A l’opposé de l’*illusion réaliste* qui s’efforce de gommer tous les indices de sa fabrication afin de susciter un effet de présence, de transparence du réel, l’*imitation décadent* souligne toutes les marques du leurre pour mettre l’accent sur l’artificialité du produit” (trans. and orig. qtd. in Spackman 37).

6. According to Gandhi, this bias derives from what Chakrabarty calls “the familiar political desire of the modern to align the world with that which was real and rational” (Gandhi 147; Chakrabarty 153). It is time, Gandhi urges, to “reexamine more critically the realist epistemology to which post-colonialism, among other disciplines in the new humanities, proffers its allegiance,” to “restore semantic plenitude to the category of the ‘political,’” and, as Chakrabarty suggests, to “breathe heterogeneity into the word ‘imagination’” (Gandhi 147; Chakrabarty 149). See also Young 4.

7. Many critics cite postcolonial literary studies’ embrace of magic realism, among other stylistic innovations, as evidence of the field’s broader commitment to





FIG. 15

Yinka Shonibare MBE, *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle*, 2009. Fiberglass, steel, brass, resin, UV ink on printed cotton textile, linen rigging, acrylic, and wood, 250 × 250 × 500 cm. Fourth Plinth Commission at Trafalgar Square, London. Courtesy of the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, and James Cohan Gallery, New York.

aesthetically complex, experimental, nonrealist works (Head 172; Cormack; Shankar).

8. Miller suggests that here “Dorian’s evil has been internalized,” but she reads the series “not as a specific comment on Wilde’s story or Lewin’s film, but as a comment on the black dandy’s heretofore colorful postcolonial re-dressing, his bold attempt at redemptive narcissism. . . . With ‘Dorian Gray,’ Shonibare seemingly critiques his own project (and that of others) of revisioning colonial objectification and postcolonial narcissism through the dandy figure” (287).

9. Shonibare echoes Baudelaire, who associates the dandy with various non-European figures and praises the dandy for “gravity amid the frivolous” (26, 28).

10. In the film, Dorian walks by Hallward and then stops to converse. Shonibare has reversed the sequence, opening up further narrative possibilities.

11. As Miller notes, “For blacks in the diaspora, the dandy’s special talent—the possibility of converting absence into presence through self-display—is not only a philosophical or psychological boon, but also, initially, a practical concern” (10).

12. Shonibare’s *Nelson’s Ship in a Bottle* occupied the “fourth plinth” (or pedestal) at the northwest corner of Trafalgar Square until January 2012 as part of a series of works commissioned by the city of London.

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FIG. 16

Yinka Shonibare  
MBE, *Nelson's Ship  
in a Bottle*, 2009.



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# “Ali Even Motivates the Dead”: The Pursuit of Sovereignty in Norman Mailer’s *The Fight*

MICHAEL COLLINS

## Sovereignty and Social Death

IN HIS 1975 NEW JOURNALISM MASTERPIECE *THE FIGHT*, NORMAN Mailer scratches his head at one of his central characters, Norman Mailer:

He wondered at his loyalty to [Muhammad] Ali. A victory for Ali would also be a triumph for Islam. While Norman was hardly a Zionist, and had never gone to Israel, he had been to Cairo. . . . Countries as gargantuan . . . and godawful as Egypt did not deserve to dictate terms to one beleaguered Hebrew idea in the desert. Since he knew little of the politics of the Near East, his politics were as straightforward as that. And conflicted with his loyalty to Ali. . . . It was striking how many Jewish writers . . . had affection for Ali . . . as if, ultimately, he was one of them, a Jew in the sense of being his own creation. . . . [An Ali victory] would be a triumph for everything which did not fit into the computer. . . . It would certainly come off as a triumph for the powers of regeneration in an artist. What could be of more importance to Norman?

(161–62)

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This passage, written in the wake of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, speaks simultaneously to the complexities of transcending ethnic and religious difference, to the idea of the individual as an incalculable work of art (Mailer, “Writing Courses” 19), and to the firing, within Mailer’s neurons, of those “supreme fictions” of the “Near East,” that, Edward Said noted in 2003, have “never been more evident than in our own time, when the mobilizations of fear, hatred, disgust, and resurgent self-pride and arrogance—much of it having to do with Islam and the Arabs on one side, ‘we’ Westerners on the other—are very much large-scale enterprises” (xvii).

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Mailer's sympathy for Israel can be traced to another "large scale enterprise," remarked upon in the following passage from a letter Mailer wrote to the writer-murderer Jack Abbott: "Just as I don't know what it is to be a convict, you the fuck don't know what it is to be a Jew. You don't know what it is to have six million of your people killed when there are only twelve million of them on earth. You don't know the profound and fundamental stunting of existence that got into the blood cells of every Jew after Hitler had done his work" ("Norman Mailer" 27). Along with much else, Mailer is expressing here a dread of social death: a dread of the condition where (to vary the infamous words of the US Supreme Court chief justice Roger Taney) outsiders have no rights that insiders need to respect—and where this lack of rights increases vulnerability to death.<sup>1</sup> Mailer clearly feels the hand of the Holocaust around his throat, and around the throat of Israel. But there is more to his dread than even that. In a 1986 presidential address to the PEN Congress, Mailer invokes both the Holocaust and "the nuclear holocaust that may yet destroy us" and quotes his 1957 essay "The White Negro," on the horror of living in the parentheses created by the Final Solution and the prospect of nuclear Armageddon: "Probably we will never be able to determine the psychic havoc of the concentration camps and the atom bomb upon the unconscious mind of almost everybody alive" (Mailer and Gordimer 23–24).

It is against the backdrop of this "psychic havoc" that Mailer's fascination with Ali (and Ali's ability to rise from the diluted social death in which southern African Americans of his era were expected to immerse themselves [*Fight* 79]) takes form. As someone who had shuddered at the thought of being "doomed to die as a cipher in some vast statistical operation" leading to "a gas chamber or a radioactive city" ("White Negro" 338), Mailer is excited to find in Ali an embodiment of

"everything which did not fit into the computer": everything beyond the ken of automated thought. Ali embodies everything that can generate the opposite of social death, everything that can generate sovereignty out to the surface of one's own skin, if not the sovereignty out to the clouds that Mailer ascribes to Ali when he calls him "the prince of heaven," before whom men "look down . . . reminded . . . of their lack of worth" (*Fight* 3), their infection with comparative social death.<sup>2</sup>

Elsewhere, Mailer reflects on the fact that Ali not only conquered the boxing world in 1964 but later became a hero of the anti-Vietnam War movement by refusing induction into the military and declaring, "No Vietcong ever called me nigger." "How he inflamed," Mailer observes, "the temper of boxing's White Establishment. . . . [He] cut like a laser . . . through the flag-dragooned salutes . . . and said, 'I got no fight with those Vietcongs,' and they cut him down, [stripping him of his title and handing him a criminal conviction]. . . . [And] he grew . . . [a]nd developed the patience to survive, the wisdom to contemplate future nights in jail" (19). Nothing "is of more importance to Norman" than such growth and regeneration because Mailer longed for Ali-esque sovereignty in his own sphere (162).

Always measuring himself against those he admires, Mailer compares the egos and inner lives of writers and fighters, observing that heavyweight champions "begin to have inner lives like Hemingway or Dostoyevsky" and *black* heavyweight champions are comparable to "Jack London, Malcolm X and Frank Costello all in one" ("King" 10–11). Mailer longed to fuse in himself even greater capabilities—to use his art, wit, and celebrity to make himself nothing less than "[his] country's savior" (Hollowell 89). Given such ambition, the stakes of artistic effort are enormous. Mailer says as much in an address to the Modern Language Association that he reprints in two of his books: "The American consciousness in the absence of a great

tradition in the novel ended by being developed by the bootlicking pieties of small-town newspaper editors and small-town educators, by the worst of organized religion [and mass media]" (*Cannibals* 102). If solving the riddle of Ali will help Mailer down the path to artistic regeneration and to possession of power to fascinate America, he will be closer to wresting the national mind from the clutches of small-town editors and educators and from the opiates of rancid religion and mindless mass media ("Ten Thousand Words" 459).

Here the new journalism genre of *The Fight* becomes crucial. True, Mailer disliked the label "new journalism," partly because he saw the term as a "self-serving" flag waved by another writer—Tom Wolfe<sup>3</sup>—and partly because he did not want to be demoted from the status of novelist to that of journalist (*Some Honorable Men* vii). He was nevertheless drawn to journalism because he saw it as having first seized from novelists, and then dragged into the mud, the task of framing reality (*Cannibals* 99). In *The Fight* and his other nonfiction, Mailer wanted to stage a counter coup, to punch through the "panels of prefabricated words" in which he believed mainstream journalism asphyxiated reality. He enlisted in

an undeclared war between two modes of perception called journalism and fiction. . . . Journalism assumes the truth of an event can be found. . . . [F]iction probably makes the secret assumption that we learn the truth through a comparison of lies, since we are obliged to receive the majority of our experience at second hand through parents, friends, mates, lovers, enemies, and the journalists who report to us. (*Some Honorable Men* ix)

Mailer's decision to make himself a character in his 1960s and 1970s nonfiction is his way of telling his readers that he is offering up the full-blown truth—with lies, distortions, prejudices, and fears inextricably fixed in it like insects in amber.

In *The Fight*, therefore, Mailer is on stage, warts and all, discussing everything from a bowel ailment he suffers to his efforts to learn the secrets of "divine inspiration" from Ali and his opponent, George Foreman (47). Mailer spies divinity in the boxers' contrasting styles: Foreman is the apotheosis of silence, concentration, and brooding power, Ali of wit, strategy, and psychological warfare. And yet, seeking to grasp and learn especially from Ali's sort of inspiration, Mailer encounters an obstacle, a phenomenon he refers to in *The Fight* as "Black": "For Heavyweight boxing was almost all black. . . . [B]oxing had become another key to the revelations of Black, one more key to black emotion, black psychology. . . . Of course, to try to learn from boxers was a quintessentially comic quest. . . . Champions were great liars. They had to be. Once you knew what they thought, you could hit them" (43).

Why does Mailer care so much about the secrets of "Black"? How did he get it into his head that there is even such a metaphysical entity as "Black" in the first place? During "the seasons of Black Power" (35), he had felt bombarded with "Black cries of Black superiority in sex, Black superiority in beauty, Black superiority in war" (*Miami* 53). There is more at work here than a mere response to the setting of white supremacist rhetoric on its head. At work is a fear of social death that sparks a jealous guarding of status and a thirst for the opposite of social death—the high status of sovereignty in one's sphere—that Mailer's resentment of claims of "Black superiority" exposes.

Even this, though, is not the whole story. "Black" as Mailer views it is its own opposite. It is an image of the incalculable that he loves and honors in Ali—and in fact tries to convert to a sort of Judaism and to make partially white (*Fight* 47, 162)—and also an image of the incalculable that threatens his own status. This becomes obvious early on in *The Fight*, when Mailer describes his state of mind in the days after his arrival in Zaire to cover the



Ali-Foreman showdown. "To be in the Congo for the first time," he laments, "and know its name had been changed. More debilitating than cannibalism . . . [t]o reach . . . the old capital of Joseph Conrad's horror, this Kinshasa, once evil Leopoldville, center of slave trade and ivory trade, and to see it through the bilious eyes of a tortured intestine! Was it part of Hemingway's genius that he could travel with healthy insides?" (21–22).

Mailer's ambition to write something that would be canonized like Joseph Conrad's work or like the African writings of Ernest Hemingway is plain here. So is a certain obliviousness to the reality of the country that had indeed had its name changed—by its dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko—from Congo to Zaire. Mailer's feeling that the name change is more debilitating than the "cannibalism" that racial mythology hangs around Africa's neck eclipses the tyranny behind the rechristening that Mobutu performed as "though to prove that he considered the Congo a personal possession" (Nzongola-Ntalaja 141). What Mobutu—who put up twenty million dollars to stage the Ali-Foreman fight (Newfield 71)—is up to is less important to Mailer than the break with the imaginative world of Conrad.

But Mailer's intestinal issues do not end there. He reports that at his hotel and elsewhere "relations between Zairois and visiting whites became mutual detestations. To obtain what one desired . . . a surly Belgian tone was the peremptory voice to offer. . . . [O]ne had to get into the skin of a *cultivateur Belgique* defining reality for plantation hands" (*Fight* 21). One had to get into the skin, in other words, of the beneficiaries of the notoriously savage colonization of Congo by Belgium (20–41). Of course, Mailer is repulsed by Belgium's crimes, but, in getting into the skin of the "*cultivateur*," he is making tactical use of the old Belgian whiteness that the crimes constructed. The undead history that makes this tactical option available explains in part Mailer's initial reaction to "Black" as he en-

counters it in Zaire—a reaction so negative that Mailer is taken aback by it: "black crowds moved about him with an indifference . . . that succeeded in niggering him. . . . How his hatred seethed in search of a justifiable excuse" (36). It is no small thing, apparently, to lose the privileges of whiteness—even though Mailer himself had campaigned against them (*Miami* 53). He does make a Houdini-like effort to escape his "newly bigoted senses" (*Fight* 36). But even as he wriggles free, Mailer finds that "his animosity [switches] a continent over to Black Americans with their . . . black new vomitous egos. . . . [T]hen he knew that he had not only come to report on a fight but to look a little more into his own outsized feelings of love and—could it be?—sheer hate for the existence of Black on earth" (37).

### The Battle for the Nervous System

Mailer's swings from love to hate of "Black" are tied to his sense of "Black" as a potential enhancer and a potential diminisher of his existence. As early as "The White Negro," in 1957, Mailer identifies "hipster" whites who absorb African American mannerisms, language, music, and synaptic states as potential leaders in the escape from the nuclear cul-de-sac into which Western culture had marched itself (340–43). These hipsters have a chance of touching the god "every hipster believes is located in the senses . . . [a] God who . . . is energy, life, sex, force, . . . [a] paradise of limitless energy and perception" (351). Even while identifying African Americans as the discoverers of this paradise that the "White Negro" enters, however, Mailer is uneasy. On the one hand, he believes that the future growth of hip "depends on whether the Negro emerges as a dominating force in American life." On the other hand, he concludes that, since "the Negro knows more about the ugliness and danger of life than the white, it is probable that if the Negro can win his equality, he will possess a potential superiority, a superiority so

feared that the fear itself has become the underground drama of domestic politics" (356).

When black people—into whose skins Mailer could not fully imagine slipping—began, with the civil rights movement, to move toward equality and, in the persons of people like Ali, toward a certain superiority, Mailer increasingly began to live the underground drama. Thus, though he concedes in his 1968 book *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* that "America's wealth, whiteness, and hygiene had been refined out of . . . the sweat of the Black man," he also confesses to an "anti-Black fury" born of dread: "he no longer knew what the Black wanted—was the Black man there to save mankind from the cancerous depredations of . . . white civilization, or [did] the Black . . . look forward to . . . destruction?" (52). In *The Fight*, Mailer is more direct, and perhaps more honest, conceding that he "could not really bring himself to applaud the emergence of a powerful people into the center of American life—he was envious. They had the good fortune to be born Black" (41). Social centrality for blacks raises for Mailer the specter of infection with social death.

And yet, in *The Fight*, love of Ali, together with a gust of acknowledgment coming his way from "Black" and a book that seems to reveal some aspects of "Black" in himself (33–35), rescues Mailer from the bitterest depths of his dread. The beginning of the rescue is the book *Bantu Philosophy*, by Father Placide Tempels, in which Mailer discovers a worldview "close to his own." Not surprisingly, in the light of Mailer's glimpse of himself in it, the book asserts that Bantu philosophy—which, as Mailer summarizes it, sounds very much like hipster philosophy—is focused on diminishment and enhancements of existence: "Bantu philosophy . . . saw humans as forces. . . . Without putting it into words, he had always believed that. . . . [A man] would take his balance . . . in a field of all the forces of the living and the dead. . . . One did one's best to live in the pull of

these forces in such a way as to increase one's own force" (38). Though Tempels's book as a map of Bantu belief systems contains a significant amount of fiction—beginning with the notion of Bantu as part of indigenous African reality<sup>4</sup>—it does capture Mailer's sense that personal force, as something that can be threatened in a multitude of ways, must be monitored and, whenever possible, increased. *The Fight* is, above all else, a portrait of forces, personal and otherwise, in motion and in collision. It ends up being a portrait of the battle for sovereignty within spheres personal, national, and international.

Boxers as Mailer portrays them are paragons of the pursuit and attainment of sovereignty within one's chosen sphere. This is why, in the paragraph that opens *The Fight*, Ali—a man with the ego and the skill to prophesy his own greatness and righteousness and to fulfill the prophecy—is "the Prince of Heaven—so says the silence around his body when he is luminous" (3). The heaven that Ali is prince of extends, as Mailer's remarks on ego make clear, well beyond the boxing ring, but it begins there and is exemplified by Ali's mastery there—his mastery there, first of all, of anxiety.

Ali, a 2½-to-1 underdog in the Foreman fight, devotes his training not only to honing his body but also to manufacturing the ego he needs to manage the anxieties produced in him by Foreman, who had demolished two opponents who had beaten Ali. Proclaiming Foreman's weaknesses and inferiority as a fighter in prefight interview after prefight interview, Ali compresses the "funk of terror . . . into psychic bricks" from which a protective "wall of ego" is built (17). This wall of ego is more than psychological. It is also, critically, physiological in a way that is tied to the pivot around which all boxing revolves: the knockout. Some of the most brilliant passages in *The Fight* capture Ali at work constructing his psychophysiological wall against the knockout in particular and defeat in general. Mailer writes:



In later years . . . Ali would concentrate . . . on how to take punches. . . . [I]t was as if Ali were teaching his nervous system to transmit shock. . . . Maybe all illness results from a failure of communication between mind and body. It is certainly true of such quick disease as a knockout. . . . [One theory holds] that a pugilist . . . cannot be knocked out if he sees the punch coming, for he suffers no dramatic lack of communication. . . . In contrast, a five-punch combination in which every shot lands is certain to stampede any opponent into unconsciousness. . . . The sudden overloading of the victim's message center is bound to produce . . . coma. (4–5)

Ring sovereignty, this passage makes clear, begins with sovereignty over the communications between one's mind and body and is completed by the ability to usurp control—with a five-punch combination, for instance—over the communications between one's opponent's nervous system and his flesh and bones. Ring sovereignty is, in short, control over one's own and one's opponent's nervous systems. This is why psychological warfare was such an important part of Ali's fights. Ali did everything he could to fiddle with the functioning of opponents' psychophysiology, making predictions of the round in which he would knock out opponents; baiting opponents at weigh-ins, during promotional appearances, and in the ring (102); and manipulating the news media (Hauser 83). Ali fiddled with what the opponent perceived about Ali, himself, and their environment, with how the opponent (which, when Ali defied the draft, was the United States) processed information. In the ring he did his fiddling, when possible, until the final shutting down of the opposing nervous system—the knockout.

Seeking control of opponents' nervous systems all the way down to the level of thoughts—the “more we don't want to think about him, the more we are obliged to,” Mailer concedes (“King” 4)—Ali is, in yet another way, a role model for Mailer as a writer. “The

White Negro” makes it clear that writer egos, like fighter egos—and, indeed, like all egos—depend on control of the nervous system, on what might be called primary sovereignty. Mailer suggests in the essay that the hipster is trying “to create a new nervous system for [himself]” and escape the old nervous system, “which has been formed from infancy, and which carries in the style of its circuits the very contradictions of our parents and our early milieu. Therefore, we are obliged . . . to meet the tempo of the present and the future with . . . antiquated nervous circuits” (345).

Mailer goes on to portray language—the medium of his profession—as a sort of extension of the nervous system. The words of hipster language, in particular, facilitate “an instinctive dialectic through which the hipster perceives his experience, that dialectic of the instantaneous differentials of existence in which one is forever moving forward into more or retreating into less” (352). Old journalism for Mailer is a vanguard of retreat into less existence, into the “mean empty hypocrisies of mass conformity” (356). The nervous system wired to these hypocrisies, unlike the “hip” nervous system, cannot detect “the possibilities within death” (342).

Control over one's own nervous system, then, is ultimately control over one's access to the “possibilities within death”—possibilities that mean everything to the Mailer who feels his existence stunted by the Holocaust and by the glinting out of the future of nuclear fires. The search for those possibilities is one of the things that draws Mailer to boxers like Ali who can look death in the eye. It is also one of the things that fires Mailer's resentment of “Black” and his resentment of anti-hip forces of “mass conformity” when they seem to eclipse alternative possibilities.

### When Sovereignties Collide

Seeking the possibilities within death, Mailer is drawn deep into the “vortex” of the Ali-

Foreman fight (*Fight* 124). It is a vortex created by the collision of enormous ambitions: Mailer's own ambition to be classed with Conrad, Melville, and Hemingway (Hollowell 88); Ali's ambition to regain the heavyweight championship; the ambition of Zaire's dictator to publicize himself and the country he was making; and the ex-numbers runner Don King's ambition to rule boxing (it was King who talked Ali and Foreman into signing on for the fight [Newfield 77]). All these ambitions flow through the Cold War structure that held Mobutu in place to create the vortex. What causes them to flow, like current between negative and positive poles, is the difference between the sovereignty the various players have before the fight and the sovereignty they want to have in the wake of the fight.

Ultimately, each seeks a version of the absolute sovereignty that Derrida discusses in the following passage: "absolute political sovereignty, 'Adam sovereign of the world like Robinson of his island,' . . . [is] a sovereignty without obstacle and therefore without enemy" (47). An absolute sovereign possesses "what we still think of today when we speak of the absolute freedom of the citizen, who decides sovereignly, for example in a voting booth. . . . [It is] a freedom and a sovereignty held to be inalienable in democracy, whatever the contradiction or the conflicts between this supposed sovereignty of the citizen subject to the law and the sovereignty of the nation-state" (21).

Those contradictions and conflicts, of course, interrupt the will of the sovereign person. The contrary wills of legislators or other decision makers, or the conflict between the decider's single unamplified decision and the immensely amplified decision of organizations able to make millions in political donations—or to detonate a heavyweight championship fight with a twenty-million-dollar-long fuse of money—limits the sovereignty of the person whose decision

is not amplified by money or position or both. How sovereign, then, is a given person in a population of unevenly amplified persons? A person is as sovereign as his or her will is uninterrupted and undiminished in some or all of what he or she surveys. This brings us to the questions at the heart of sovereignty: How much of his or her environment is a given person able to survey, and how little interrupted can a person's will be in that environment? How many of the resources needed to amplify his or her will—to make it felt throughout the domain he or she surveys—does a person have or have access to? How much *say* can a person have in a given arena?<sup>5</sup> How strong a nervous system does the person have, and how much of the world can the person make an extension of that system?

Such questions underlie Mailer's reflection, midway through *The Fight*, on a pronouncement Don King makes during a geyser of hyperbole. Ali, King asserts, "appeals to all segments of our world. . . . Ali even motivates the dead" (117). Mailer decides that King's words flow from a "Black," "organic philosophy walking in now, centuries late, from the savannah and the rain forest," and he speculates (as he does elsewhere) that this "Black" wisdom may be part of what will save the West. Above all, he takes seriously the idea of larger-than-life influence: "Ali even motivates the dead," said King, and was talking of natural human powers. Some men have it more than others" (121).

Eager to test how much of such mystical ability he himself might have—how much sovereignty over the vortex he might wield—Mailer "[t]hat night, after drinking with King, . . . found himself on the balcony of his room . . . [a] balcony . . . without a railing. . . . From the unprotected lip, you could look down into a fall of seven stories" (122). Mailer contemplates performing the somewhat dangerous maneuver of stepping around a partition separating his balcony from its neighbor. "How ridiculous a way to get yourself killed." And



yet, when he briefly decides to abandon the idea, “he felt disloyal to Ali”: he “knew Muhammad’s chances would be greater if he did it. . . . And was furious at the vanity. Ali did not need his paltry magic—‘Ali even motivates the dead.’ Of course, considering Foreman, Ali might need all the help he can get” (124). So, Mailer performs his rite, both for Ali and for himself, and concludes that as a “modest element in this oncoming collision, he must have been picked up by forces he could find familiar but hardly comprehend” (125).

If Mailer succeeds in touching Ali’s destiny, if he succeeds in influencing the odds that govern the vortex, his magic will have been shown to be less paltry than he fears. He will have evidence of having advanced along the road to culture-shaping influence. He decides that “a victory for Muhammad . . . would be like a sign of liberation for himself” (163). One need not accept Mailer’s mystical, magical viewpoint to see in the fight something emerging from the vortex that borders on the miraculous in the sense that it makes a mind-boggling intervention in reality. The fight, after all, was dropped into the vortex like a hook with which the various sovereignty seekers sought variously to snare the world.

In the stare-down that immediately precedes the actual exchange of blows, Ali goes after Foreman’s nervous system. Fulfilling a promise to say something just before the bout that would “affect [Foreman’s] mind” (Hauser 267), Ali declares, “You have heard of me since you were young. You’ve been following me since you were a little boy. Now you must meet me, your master!” (Mailer, *Fight* 177). And “Foreman blinked,” Mailer reports, “Foreman looked surprised as if he had been impressed just a little more than he expected.” Since the essence of boxing is “the exclusion of outside influence” and since Foreman did all he could to achieve this essence—behaving in the days before the fight like one “preparing to defend himself against the thoughts of everyone alive”—it is signifi-

cant that Ali causes him to blink and thus lose the stare-down (30, 48).

Once the punches start, Ali disrupts a prefight promise Foreman made to himself—a promise “to keep [his] mind working on the things [he] set forth for it”—by hitting Foreman with right-hand lead punches. “Champions,” Mailer explains, “do not hit other champions with right hand leads.” In a game of millimeters and milliseconds, the punch is viewed as an insult because in “nearly all positions, the right hand lead has longer to travel, a foot more at least than the left.” And in the extra milliseconds it takes to reach its target, “counterattacks are beginning.” Outraged by the blows, Foreman attacks as if to “dismember Ali” (180).

Ali’s next move is to milk Foreman’s rage with a masterstroke of strategy: as Foreman tries to drive Ali to the ropes and pound him into paste, Ali gives Foreman his wish and actually backs into the ropes, launching what he and his team later called the “rope-a-dope” strategy of having a mightier opponent squander his force.<sup>6</sup> So “long as Foreman had strength,” Mailer explains, “the ropes would prove about as safe as riding a bicycle on a parapet. Still, what is genius but balance on the edge of the impossible? Ali introduced his grand theme. . . . Can he dismantle Foreman’s strength before he uses up his own wit?” (185, 189).

Ali’s wit proves inexhaustible, as he uses even his eyes to confuse Foreman, or to hold the stronger man “soul to soul”—primary sovereignty to primary sovereignty (196). In the eighth round, physically and psychologically exhausted, Foreman is caught in a whirlpool of bewilderment as Ali comes off the ropes and launches “a big projectile exactly the size of a fist in a glove into the middle of Foreman’s mind” (208). This knockout punch is the perfect illustration of the theory of shutting down the nervous system by giving it more than it can handle. It restored Ali’s ring sovereignty with its double

demonstration of his mastery of both his own nervous system and Foreman's.

### "Power of the Most Frightening Sort"

After the fight, Mailer, who has been speculating about it all along, has reason to consider how far beyond the ring Ali might now be able to extend his sovereignty. The control over his own nervous system, which Foreman's blows could not usurp, is evidence of an overwhelming primary sovereignty on Ali's part. But could this primary sovereignty be converted into political sovereignty? After the fight, Ali speaks of the need to go past "conquering the world with my fists" and "bring freedom to my people." And Mailer takes him seriously: "He was going after all of it. And why not" (222). Earlier in the book, Mailer expresses a characteristic mixture of excitement and consternation over this possibility—an excitement and consternation summed up in a name he coins for Ali after Ali declares that if "I win . . . I'm going to be the Black Kissinger." "Here was this tall pale Negro from Louisville," Mailer writes, "living with a vision of himself as a world-leader . . . leader doubtless of future Black and Arab republics. . . . Muhammad Mobutu Napoleon Ali" (79).<sup>7</sup>

Mailer's mixed feelings about the Islamic element in Ali's identity—"Muhammad" in this double portmanteau name—have already been discussed. "Napoleon" suggests conquests in line with Ali's ambitions. "Mobutu" is a partial renewal of Mailer's blindness to a crucial part of the vortex, since it appears to stand in more for the Bantu philosophy with which Mailer is having his romance than for the dictatorship that he never fully condemns. When he wonders whether "Muhammad Mobutu Napoleon Ali [had] come for an instant face to face with the differences between Islam and Bantu" (79), Mailer reveals a desire for Ali to come around to Mailer's way of seeing Bantu and political Islam as, respectively, being-enhancing and threatening.

Focused on such matters, Mailer misses crucial elements of the vortex—elements more powerful and consequential than the mystical currents he engages on his balcony. In particular, he misses the links between Mobutu and the Cold War, one of Mailer's great obsessions. His assessment of Mobutu early in the book is, by his own admission, twisted in the coils of his troubled intestine. But he overcompensates for the fact that "bile" spurs his "pleasure in the observation that this Black one-party revolutionary state had managed to couple some of the most oppressive aspects of communism with the most reprehensible in capitalism" (22). After his bowel ailment fades, Mailer finds that he not only "could no longer hate the Zairois" but also cannot "even be certain of his condemnation of their own Black oppressors" (36–37). The synthesis of Mailer's emotional thesis and antithesis comes when Zaire is explained to him by "a most intelligent American living in Kinshasa for years, adept at several occupations"—an American who, if he is not a CIA officer, certainly offers the CIA perspective on Mobutu. "You see," the American explained, "it's hardly a question of liking Mobutu. No American is going to feel enthusiastic about a man whose head appears out of a cloud every night on national television" (106). But the American voices grudging respect for Mobutu's manipulation of symbols and levers of power: "If you add up the details [of how he presents himself to his people] . . . it is not short of genius. . . . Mobutu has the country functioning. . . . Black power is talked about everywhere—it is in some fashion actually being practiced here." The American concludes by pronouncing the name of Mobutu's official ideology-cum-cult of personality—Mobutism—and declaring that Mobutu is "[b]old, trivial and imperial—an African mind" (112).

It would be more accurate to say that Mobutu's was a Cold War mind. The dictator, Mailer notes in passing, enjoys "the remarkable good favor of the CIA in Kin-



shasa, who were reputed to have pulled off the coup which first brought him to power" (29). But Mailer fails—perhaps because he is protecting or cultivating a source—to link Mobutu's fusion of the worst of communism and capitalism to the CIA (and French and Belgian) sponsors who made the fusion possible. Mailer at one point wonders if he is being too "extreme," linking Mobutu's taste for mind-numbing architecture to the worst of the old Belgian Congo. But he does not dig deep enough to find the specific practices that amounted to a continuance on Mobutu's part (and therefore that of the CIA and its French and Belgian counterparts) of Belgian-style colonialism by other means (Hochschild 304; Dunn 119). Accepting without question the "African mind" conclusion of his informant, Mailer does not connect the Mobutu mendacity surrounding the vortex to the mendacity of other countries' Zaire policies.

Of course, every mendacity, viewed from a certain angle, is gospel truth—or at least part of a "regime of truth."<sup>8</sup> The United States imposed its us-versus-the-Soviets grid on the Congo from the moment Patrice Lumumba led it to independence in 1960. Though Lumumba wanted ties with the United States, the CIA saw him as "the Castro of Africa" (Weiner 162)—as someone who could never in any sense be true—and was almost immediately given the OK to kill him and install Mobutu. Lumumba was duly captured by Mobutu and, eventually, delivered to enemies who murdered him. Then, with "the unwavering support of the CIA, Mobutu . . . gained full control of the Congo after a five-year struggle." He became "the agency's favorite ally in Africa and the clearinghouse for American covert action throughout the continent" (163). Cobbling together a sovereignty composed of elements drawn from Tanzania, China, North Korea, France, India, and Germany, Mobutu relied above all on "the political security of a close liaison with the American government" (281; see

also Dunn 110–19). In a cowboy movie shot by the CIA, Mobutu (whose domain was rich with strategic minerals [Kalb 386]) would have worn the white hat, Lumumba the black. And yet the white hat was a lie that grew to ridiculous proportions, grew more egregious in its whiteness with every year of Mobutu's rule, with every dollar he stole and every life he snuffed out—a lie that grew even with the twenty million dollars he spent to publicize himself, his Zaire, and the Mobutuism celebrated on a sign Mailer notices: "A fight between two Blacks in a Black nation, organized by Blacks and seen by the whole world; that is a victory for Mobutuism" (*Fight* 20). Mailer quotes these words with heavy irony, but he never digs into the implications of Mobutu's bond with the CIA. He thereby fails to appreciate fully that he is in a cockpit of the very Cold War he demands be brought to an end in some of his other writings. In short, as a journalist, he misses a big part of the story.

He misses, in particular, the fact that the Ali-Foreman fight is a scene in an epic nonfiction novel that Mobutu and his paid theoreticians were struggling to write. Mailer, who railed against the "totalitarian prose" of a Lyndon Johnson campaign tome (*Cannibals* 47–52), does not connect the dots of Mobutu's reality that Kevin C. Dunn does by observing that Mobutu manipulated both Western stereotypes about the Congo and the postcolonial discourses of sovereignty of his era's new nations, in order to construct a politically prehensile and infinitely devious narrative that made him the only possible ruler of Zaire (105–38). Mobutu, an ex-journalist, expertly manipulated Western governments and the Euro-American press, employing "Western popular discourses to construct an identity of 'Zaire' that was acceptable to the West. The primary sources for this project were . . . works of Belgian scholars, such as . . . *Bantu Philosophy*" (118). Mailer was far more critical of Mobutu than many of the "old" journalists of the American press.<sup>9</sup> But he was brought

up short by the very CIA narrative of Zaire that Mobutu played on and partially ventriloquized (118).

### Half of Tennis

It is only decades later, in the wake of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, that Mailer reached the conclusions he might have drawn in 1974. In his remarkable essay "The White Man Unburdened," Mailer asks why we went to war with Iraq in 2003. His answer includes a comparison of the United States military to "a great young athlete looking to test his true size," a comparison of Saddam Hussein to a "hollowed-out palooka," and a description of Hussein's Iraq as "a bozo out in the boon-docks" (4, 6, 4). Mailer explains how athlete, palooka, and bozo are linked:

there [are] other [reasons] for using our military skills . . . [that] return us to the ongoing malaise of the white American male. He had been taking a daily drubbing over the last thirty years. For better or worse, the women's movement has had its breakthrough successes and the old, easy white male ego has withered in the glare. . . . The great *white* [sports] stars of yesteryear [are] for the most part gone, gone in football, in basketball, in boxing. . . . Black genius now [prevails] in all these sports. . . . We white men [are] now left with half of tennis. (4)

What does any of this have to do with the Iraq War? A great deal, in Mailer's view, since the "covert strength" of George W. Bush, who ordered the 2003 war, was "his knowledge of the unspoken things that bothered American white men the most." Knocking out a "bozo" named Iraq was, Mailer alleges, therapy for this sort of malaise. Mailer has special credibility on the issue of white male malaise since—for all his revulsion at the 2003 war—there is a lot of Mailer in the American male with a wound in his whiteness.

But, as we have seen, for Mailer this wound goes deeper than mere whiteness, to

the stunting of being he feels as a Jew after the Holocaust. "Whiteness" for him is arguably part of a protective covering, a shield of invulnerability gored both by the West's self-destructive tendencies and by the "Black" that leaves white men only "half of tennis" and war to turn to. But he is exceptionally uneasy behind his shield: "I am a white American, more or less," he asserts in an anxious reflection on black power ("Looking" 303). His sense of liminality helps explain both his fascination with "Black" and his flights to "White."

On Ralph Ellison's "lower frequencies," Mailer speaks for those aggrieved white males—and aggrieved white females—that he psychoanalyzes in "The White Man Unburdened." This is what makes Mailer's frank accounts of his own eruptions of bigotry so illuminating. As early as 1968, Mailer sketched the racial anxiety that since 2008 has spilled out of talk radio and infected the entire American right. Reporting at the 1968 Republican National Convention, Mailer confesses to a bigotry eruption triggered by the lateness of the civil rights leader Ralph Abernathy: "the reporter [Mailer] became aware after a while of a curious emotion in himself . . . he was getting tired of Negroes and their rights. . . . [I]f he felt even a hint this way, then what immeasurable tides of rage must be loose in America itself?" (*Miami* 51). "America the beautiful"—"that angel of security," Mailer adds, is being eclipsed by "the face of an accusing rioting Black right in the middle of the dream."

"[P]olitical power of the most frightening sort," Mailer warned in 1968, "was obviously waiting for the first demagogue who would smash the obsession and free the white man of his guilt [for past racial crimes]" (51). In his self-diagnosis and his diagnosis of the nation, Mailer executes a delicate and still-instructive psychological balancing act. He claims whiteness and all it entails. But at the same time he maintains what he calls in *The Fight* a "sentimental orgy" of affection for "Black" that can



only be disappointed by actual human beings rather than by the “Noir” of his imagination (35): “was the Black liberty to exploit the white man without measure, which he had claimed for the Black so often, . . . finally too offensive for him to support? . . . [H]e was . . . so depressed with Black inhumanity to Black in Biafra” (*Miami* 53).

### The Politics of Delusion

Mailer’s love-hate balancing act is not unlike the balancing act he performs on his balcony, where he invested in an Ali victory in the hope of regenerating his own artistry and influence. In confessing his bigoted feelings and using them to divine the state of the white psyche, he is seeking to regenerate his sense of his best self and to influence readers who might recognize similar feelings in themselves.

More generally, Mailer is engaged in the balancing of what might be called a portfolio of sovereignties. He is contemplating the investment implications for him of the rising sovereignty of “Black” (to which he claims to have made a contribution with his political pronouncements and his literary influence on black writers [53]), the rising anger of “White” (which he suggests might end in apocalyptic, Hitler-style demagoguery but in which he is nevertheless partly invested), and the twisting away from him of the “Black” he had his sentimental orgy with in “The White Negro.”

How best to invest his time, imagination, and celebrity? What sort of sovereignty—white? black? some “White Negro” fusion?—to nudge forward next? Mailer clearly hedges his bets—investing in “Black” but shielding himself in whiteness, loving Ali but reframing him as Jewish, eviscerating the prejudices of middle America but using those prejudices to protect himself from proclamations of black superiority, identifying Mobutu as a tyrant but allowing his tyranny to be classified as a natural function of an “African mind.” Hedging in this way, Mailer works to maxi-

mize his sovereignty in every context, just as an investor in a portfolio of stocks and bonds seeks to balance his investments so as to maximize his wealth and minimize his risk.<sup>10</sup>

Needing security, all people engage in such balancing of sovereignties. Mobutu was no different when, through his agents, he agreed to finance the fight (Newfield 57–59, 62–71). Mobutu was a paradigmatic balancer of sovereignties, and it will be useful to conclude this essay with a quick look at just how he balanced, like a spider on its web, until the whole web collapsed, killing millions. Mailer’s informant points out that Mobutu kept his soldiers relatively well paid and well supplied with beer but also kept them divided by language so that no critical mass of a given ethnic group could coalesce and move against him. We have seen, too, that the CIA invested heavily in Mobutu, and he returned the favor by making Zaire a sort of immense CIA station for the running of the Cold War in Africa.

The CIA actually helped Mobutu put down some rebellions against his sovereignty over Zaire, on the basis of the idea that an “externally backed autocracy [like his], both distant from its own society and impervious to popular aspirations,” was “preferable to [governments] with strong national constituencies, to which they were accountable” (Nzongola-Ntalaja 142). And Mobutu, investing the sovereignty thus secured, allowed the United States to stage attacks against what it saw as bad sovereigns—Marxist or apparently Marxist neighboring governments—that might become part of the Soviet threat to the American sphere of, yes, sovereignty.

Mobutu’s case illustrates the fact that only sovereignty can be used to invest in sovereignty. As if mad with this notion, Mobutu invested enormous amounts of his time and energy—enormous amounts of the activity of his nervous system and the primary sovereignty that controlled it—in stealing his nation’s wealth. This theft increased his sovereignty, his ability to, for instance, unilaterally

authorize the investment of twenty million dollars in the Ali-Foreman fight and to order the advertising of the fight as a victory for Mobutuism. Mobutuism—and a parallel program of “authenticity” that, among other things, required all citizens to exchange Western names for African ones (166–67)—appears to be a part of Mobutu’s effort to find a way “of counterbalancing, or even concealing, his dependence on Western support” (147; see also 147–60)—“he was eager to . . . establish himself as an authentic African nationalist” (Kalb 379–80). His unique kleptonationalism helped him keep supporters by showering them with wealth and positions even as he subjected opponents to “extrajudicial executions, massacres . . . and banishment to remote penal colonies” (Nzongola-Ntalaja 141, 150). He even invested at times in democratic fig leaves. In 1977, for example, Mobutu, under pressure from President Jimmy Carter, allowed parliamentary elections that “were the freest vote possible under a one-party dictatorship” (184). Investing in these and other ways, Mobutu maintained a healthy portfolio of sovereignties that included the bonds with the United States (as well as France and Belgium), the investments in nationalism under the authenticity program, the investments in his own cult that Mailer witnessed, and the investment in repression and murder.

Mobutu’s case demonstrates that in many ways sovereignty behaves like money. Like money, sovereignty can be created by fiat (as the sovereignty of the United States was by the Declaration of Independence and Zaire by the word of Mobutu). Like money, sovereignty can be used to make more of itself, as Ali’s remarkable primary sovereignty, his remarkable control over his own nervous system, was used to capture ring sovereignty that was in turn used to defy nothing less than the United States government in a way that made him a hero of the anti-Vietnam War movement. Like money, sovereignty is ultimately based on credit and credibility—on the abil-

ity to make promises and threats, to wage cold war or to sign contracts.<sup>11</sup>

Mobutu’s seemingly infinite credit line with the West was withdrawn at the end of the Cold War. His sovereignty, deeply rotted by his mismanagement, began to crumble from the borders of his country in toward his primary sovereignty, which was under attack by cancer. With the genocide in Rwanda, Mobutu saw a last chance to invest and to rebuild his portfolio. After the perpetrators of the genocide were defeated, many of their leaders regrouped and began to plot a reconquest of Rwanda in refugee camps in Zaire. Mobutu saw the refugees’ presence on his territory as, among other things, an opportunity “to blackmail the international community into reaccepting him” (Prunier 27). Seeking to draw in the West, Mobutu allowed those who had led the genocide to “rearm” and to harass “Rwanda militarily from their safe havens and camps” (28). But in September 1996, Rwanda responded by invading Zaire. For reasons too complex to explain here, this invasion not only unraveled Mobutu’s entire web but also opened a two-part, intra-African world war in which millions died (Turner 1–3; see also Prunier).

It is of course asking too much of Mailer or of any mortal to have foreseen this. But had he not agonized so much over what to make of “Black,” he might have painted a deeper portrait of the forces that shaped the vortex of the fight—forces that were not those discussed in *Bantu Philosophy* but were part of what Gérard Prunier calls “the order of the cold war” (359). In the time he spent in Zaire, Mailer was living in exhibit B (the Vietnam War being his generation’s exhibit A) of his idea that the Cold War was an “instrument of a megalomaniacal delusion” that needed to be ended. Living in the delusion, Mailer asserted, “can only brutalize the minds” of Americans and served to hold “back the emergence of an America more alive” (“From a Debate” 537–38).



In Zaire, Mailer had before him evidence that America was not alone in being held back and that more than minds were being brutalized. He might have used *The Fight* to attempt to raise an alarm. Properly sounded, a Mailer alarm might have begun to break the stalemate between “two competing discursive trends: one anti-Mobutu produced by scholars and the other pro-Mobutu produced by government and economic interests” (Dunn 132). Given his status as a celebrity public intellectual who not only cofounded *Dissent* and the *Village Voice* but was declared, in a 1973 *Time* essay, to be a “superstar” on par with the Marilyn Monroe shown stroking his curls on the magazine’s cover (Kanfer 60), a Mailer adding his say to that of the scholars might have helped loosen the grip of delusions that, in the obsessions of today’s angry (and mostly white) right, cling to the nation’s synapses still (Dennis and Rivers 37).

## NOTES

1. For more on social death, see Patterson 1–45.
2. Sovereignty and status are like the chicken and the egg: high status gives one a certain power to command in some spheres, but, as when a person is knighted, attained sovereignty within one’s sphere can bring high status.
3. Wolfe also claimed to dislike the term. But he loved the “panic” caused by the new journalism’s “dethroning” of the “novel as the number one literary genre” (3). And Wolfe jabs Mailer in a manner that must have stung, arguing that Mailer’s nonfictional *The Armies of the Night* rescued him from an inability to write “convincing dialogue” by allowing him to quote from transcripts (189).
4. Ray notes that Tempels uses “the Bergsonian notion of ‘vital force.’ . . . His . . . limitations become apparent the more deeply one penetrates into African ritual and symbolism. On this level, such general notions as ‘force’ and ‘vitality’ are not precise enough to deal with the complex logic of the ideas and symbols involved” (12–13); about the European origins of “Bantu,” see Turner 52–56. Hountondji sums up Tempels’s agenda by noting that his concluding chapter is entitled “Bantu Philosophy and Our Mission to Civilize” (34).
5. For more on say, see Collins.
6. With “rope-a-dope,” Ali added a new phrase to the English language, as well as a new conceptual category.

Political analysts, like those who argue that President Obama regularly rope-a-dopes his opponents, frequently use the term.

7. Although Ali never became a world leader, efforts were made to make him a sort of freelance Kissinger. The primary sovereignty he demonstrated in his victory won so many hearts and so magnified his legend and his say that President Gerald Ford sought to add Ali’s say to his own. Seeking to heal an America “torn apart” by racial and political furies, Ford invited Ali to the White House as a way of showing that Americans should “listen to one another. . . . [Ali] was part of my overall [and successful] effort to heal the wounds of racial division, Vietnam, and Watergate” (Hauser 281). Later, Jimmy Carter attempted, somewhat more problematically, to add Ali’s say to his own by sending the boxer on a mission to convince African nations to protest the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan by boycotting the 1980 Olympics. During the mission, Ali expressed a goal that would have been dear to Mailer’s heart: to avert nuclear war (Hauser 395–98).

8. “Each society has its regime of truth . . . that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true” (Foucault 131).

9. For a summary of news reports from the United States on Mobutu, see Dunn 124–25.

10. Choice among financial portfolios depends on appetite for risk: “If safety is of extreme importance, ‘likely return’ must be sacrificed to decrease uncertainty” (Markowitz 6–7).

11. In its last years, the sovereignty of Zaire and Mobutu “became primarily important in helping to legitimize deals with foreign firms” by providing “an interlocutor who acknowledges debts” (Dunn 136).

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# Awkward Moments: Melodrama, Modernism, and the Politics of Affect

BENJAMIN KOHLMANN

*Every eye must weep alone  
Till I Will be overthrown.*

—W. H. Auden, *Another Time* (7)

**T**HEODOR ADORNO'S *HEGEL: THREE STUDIES* (1963) OPENS WITH A meditation on the forms of intellectual "appreciation." Just because we have the "dubious good fortune to live later," Adorno notes, we are not entitled "sovereignly" to "assign the dead person his place" or to "elevat[e]" ourselves "above him." Much will be gained, he argues, if the question of appreciation is reversed. Instead of posing the "loathsome question" whether past modes of thinking and feeling have "any meaning for the present," we should ask "what the present means in the face of [the past]" (1). This dialectical inversion would enable us to think of history not as a teleological progression from a closed-off past to a present that can freely choose from the knowledge of earlier generations but as a process whereby the present is reconfigured in terms that may seem anachronistic and alien to it.

Adorno's model yields an approach that can illuminate a specific literary-historical constellation of the 1920s and 1930s—the complex persistence of the seemingly antiquated theatrical form of melodrama in the works of some of modernism's most famously political writers: Bertolt Brecht, W. H. Auden, and Christopher Isherwood. The apparent awkwardness of melodramatic affects in the context of modernist drama is largely the product of a particular kind of critical discourse about modernism, and I want to suggest that an exploration of these elements in the works of Brecht and his collaborator Elisabeth Hauptmann and of Auden and Isherwood can prompt a recalibration of established critical views of modernism's affective economies. Brecht

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and Hauptmann's *Happy End: A Melodrama with Songs* (1929) and Auden and Isherwood's *On the Frontier: A Melodrama in Three Acts* (1938) oscillate between the attempt to ironize an apparently retrograde artistic form and the desire to adapt it to a new set of political and artistic principles.<sup>1</sup> Both plays start out from the assumption that a truly radical theater will have to reform not only the minds but also the emotions of its spectators, and both try to harness the affective strategies of melodrama to this purpose. At the same time, the genre's long involvement with bourgeois ideology meant that it threatened to compromise the artistic project of demystifying social and aesthetic structures.

The ambivalent foray into melodrama sheds a light on the modernism of Brecht and of Auden and Isherwood as well as on the period in which their dramas were written.<sup>2</sup> Both plays respond to a historical moment that generated an unprecedented surge of creative activity among left-wing artists. The mounting labor unrest in the Weimar Republic during the 1920s revealed the dramatic plight of the working classes—developments that found a parallel in Britain during the 1926 general strike and the hunger marches of the 1930s. While left-wing artists were united in their indignation at the living conditions of the poor, there are evident ideological and historical differences separating Brecht from Auden and Isherwood. The first production of *Happy End* took place only a few weeks before Black Tuesday dealt the final blow to an economy that had been in decline for some time, and Brecht and Hauptmann's play addresses itself to a historical situation in which concerns about economic speculation and exploitation are paramount. *On the Frontier*, by contrast, falls into the Popular Front period of the mid-1930s, with its broad alliance of liberal and communist ideologies against the rise of fascism in Europe. In addition to their political orientation, *Happy End* and *On the Frontier* reflect generational anxieties that

haunted many authors who began to write in the years after World War I. These young interwar writers belonged to what the German novelist Ernst Glaeser called the *Jahrgang 1902*—authors who had been old enough to feel the impact of World War I and who might have lost relatives during the war but who had been born too late to fight in it themselves. This generation's guilt at not having fought in the war compounded the difficulty of imagining tragedy anew after the horrors of World War I.<sup>3</sup> Isherwood's remarks, in his 1939 autobiography *Lions and Shadows*, capture the feeling that tragedy was not an easily accessible literary option for the trench generation's inexperienced younger brothers: "Our frightful mistake was that we believed in tragedy: the point is, tragedy's quite impossible nowadays. . . . We ought to aim at being essentially comic writers" (173). "Comic" here indicates a wider sense of living in posttragic times as well as the strenuous search for new political and artistic ideals. Walter Benjamin similarly noted in his influential early essay "What Is Epic Theater?" that Brecht's resistance to theatrical conventions and to the special dramatic attention accorded to individuals of rank was fundamentally "untragic" (149). In this context, I suggest, melodrama offered a way of exploring new moral systems, and it enabled the articulation of utopian hopes that were fueled by Marxist predictions about the emergence of a postcapitalist world order. *Happy End* and *On the Frontier* provide central test cases both for an "untragic" worldview and for the attempt to leave behind some traditionally privileged dramatic modes, like tragedy, and to experiment with the repurposing of anti-individualist genres.

In the late 1920s and the 1930s, melodrama was such a genre, and it spurred leftist interest. Theater and film melodrama had long been successful among the working classes, the very audience to which left-wing writers were seeking access. To Auden, writing in his preface to *The Oxford Book of Light Verse*



(1938), popular literary forms granted the “modern poet” a temporary reprieve from isolation: they promised the bourgeois author a “home” by integrating him with the “genuine community” of his audience (“Introduction” 436). Moreover, melodrama had an impressive record of being co-opted for political aims. Its origins as a dramatic form reached back to the French Revolution, when it was used to expose the injustice of the feudal ancien régime; and it had also experienced a more recent efflorescence in postrevolutionary Russia (Gerould). In the hands of Brecht and Hauptmann and of Auden and Isherwood, however, melodrama became a double-edged weapon. Its appropriation raised a number of problems in the context of a modernist aesthetic that sought to change the phenomenology of theatergoing. Melodrama is an example of “bad modernism”:<sup>4</sup> its unabashed status as popular entertainment, its longevity as a form, and its seeming complicity with bourgeois ideology were jarringly at odds with the avant-garde desire to “make it new.” In particular, melodrama’s attempt to nullify the boundary between spectators and actors—its courting of powerful affects in an effort to forge a unity of feeling among a passive audience—conflicts with a much cited “modernist resistance to the theater” (Puchner 141). If modernist theater is driven by a creatively self-destructive impulse of antitheatricality, melodrama becomes modernism’s obvious antipode, falling into the category of writing that Brecht condemned as “culinary” (“Zu: *Aufstieg und Fall*” 76).

The ambivalent engagement with melodramatic affects in *Happy End* and *On the Frontier* is partly rooted in the circumstances in which these plays were written and produced. Brecht and Kurt Weill had scored an overwhelming commercial triumph with their *Threepenny Opera* at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm in 1928, while Auden and Isherwood’s *The Ascent of F6* had done well at Group Theatre in London in February 1937. *Happy End* (with music by Weill) and

*On the Frontier* (with an accompanying score by Benjamin Britten) were designed to cash in on the success of the dramas that preceded them, and both plays were more deliberately conceived with an eye to wide popular appeal than their predecessors. Melodrama promised a ready recipe for a hit, and the two plays were accordingly under pressure to strike a balance between the taxonomies of the avant-garde and of the middlebrow, the artistically innovative and the commercially profitable.

In what follows, I read *Happy End* and *On the Frontier* alongside each other to demonstrate modernism’s significant investment in (melodramatic) affect. In examining *Happy End*, I investigate the tensions that melodrama created in Brecht’s early development of theatrical estrangement effects, while my analysis of *On the Frontier* emphasizes the facility with which Auden and Isherwood drew on a repertoire of melodramatic conventions. Following Adorno’s claim that the detached “aesthetic experience” (“ästhetische Erfahrung”) demanded by modernist texts excludes sentimentality and the “simulated feelings” of commodified “kitsch” (*Aesthetic Theory* 397–98), much scholarship about modernism has bracketed questions of affect and emotion.<sup>5</sup> I propose that scholars need to develop reading strategies that make it possible to recuperate the force of modernist affects and to identify the challenges that these affective configurations pose to still-dominant accounts of modernist writing as cerebral and epistemologically difficult.<sup>6</sup> The role of melodramatic pathos in *Happy End* and *On the Frontier* (and the wider theoretical debates about feeling and sentiment surrounding these plays) can open up a route into the poetics and politics of affect during the interwar years.

### Estranging the Estrangement Effect in *Happy End*

It is often claimed that Brecht’s works valorize contemplation over identification, intellectual

detachment over emotional enthrallment, and his programmatic codifications of epic theater from the mid-1930s onward support this view. This established reading neglects that “epic drama” was a heterogeneous and notoriously underdefined ensemble of ideas. As the double gestures of demystification and illusion in *Happy End* indicate, Brecht’s theatrical practice raised problems that his own theoretical explanations left largely unexamined. The play’s difficulties in achieving the right kind of closure do not stem from a conscious decision by Brecht to rule out dramatic affect in favor of the more strictly analytic optic of epic theater. Instead, *Happy End* can be read as an exploration of what Brecht called “the social use of sentimentality” (*Dreigroschenprozess* 448).

The complex uses to which affect is put in Brecht’s dramas can be observed especially well in *Happy End*’s uneasy espousal of melodramatic strategies. The action of the play is located in Chicago (though the setting is largely deprived of local color) and concerns the burgeoning love affair between Lillian Holiday (“Hallelujah Lil”), a lieutenant in the Salvation Army, and the hard-boiled gangster Bill Cracker. The opening of *Happy End* already announces Brecht and Hauptmann’s aim to defamiliarize plot conventions. The first scene is set in a bar in which a figure called Professor is held hostage and subjected to torture and abuse by Bill’s gang. The action suggests that this might be a blackmail scene from a sensationalist crime drama, but the audience’s expectations are disrupted when the Professor rips off his false moustache and a gang member asks for the action to be repeated “one more time” (6). It becomes clear that the Professor is also a member of the gang and that the scene was only a dress rehearsal for the group’s next robbery coup. By revealing the action to be a quasi-theatrical performance, the opening of *Happy End* highlights the anti-illusionist techniques of estrangement that were central to epic theater more generally. The scene is designed

to thwart audience expectations, but it also seems intended to exorcize Brecht and Hauptmann’s worries about the low- and middle-brow appeal, the bland entertainment value, that popular genres might have for their audience. By drawing attention to its own artificiality, the first scene attempts to contain the artistic anxieties that the play’s classification as a melodrama reintroduces at a higher level.

Critics have often noted the generic slipperiness of melodrama.<sup>7</sup> However, *Happy End* reflects the loose “cluster” of generic features that Ben Singer describes as characteristic of early-twentieth-century film and theater melodrama: pathos, heightened emotionality, moral polarization, nonclassical narrative mechanics, and spectacular effects (44–49). As the action unfolds, Brecht and Hauptmann seek to debunk some of the conventions of melodrama—above all, the heavily moralized opposition between virtue and vice—and the affective structures to which they give rise. *Happy End*’s attack on the binary opposition between gangsters and Salvation Army is launched by various routes. For instance, the play traces the love interest between Lillian and Bill, the head of the gang (after the ominous Fly, or Lady in Grey). In the course of the action, the lovers are forced to make moral compromises. Lillian becomes estranged from the Salvation Army and lies to the police to provide Bill with an alibi, while Bill (who prefers to spend time with Lil) fails to show up for the gang’s major robbery coup. The antagonisms between virtue and vice begin to crumble in the love plot, and they break down completely at the end of the play when the gangsters ask to join the Salvation Army after their line of “business” is taken over by the powerful banks (68). Having joined forces, both groups make a rousing pledge to help other victims of capitalist oppression.

While *Happy End* unsettles certain melodramatic conventions, the Bill-and-Lillian plot borrows one of the most popular elements of domestic-realist melodrama: an (ap-



parently) doomed love between two youthful characters from disparate social groups. In Brecht and Hauptmann's play this conventional plotline becomes problematic because the audience's emotional investments in the two characters, as well as the melodramatic internalization of social conflicts and the promise of reconciliation and a happy ending, constantly threaten to direct attention away from the play's underlying political messages. *Happy End* accordingly struggles to balance the affective momentum of its central plot (and the attempt to use that attraction for the purposes of a new radical politics) and an impulse to expose the form's artificiality. The scene in which Bill and Lillian realize that they are in love illustrates *Happy End*'s precarious negotiations of sentimental affects and modernist critique:

LILLIAN. Why are you unhappy?

BILL. I ain't! And I don't need an unemployed hallelujah tootsie telling me how to run my life.

LILLIAN. You think that's all there is to me.

BILL. I don't see nothin' else.

LILLIAN. You don't think a woman can suffer like a man.

BILL. I don't care if she does.

LILLIAN. You do care. But you want to believe you don't care.

BILL. Try me. (55)

Following the half-serious teasing and mocking of this exchange, Lillian decides to appeal to Bill's emotions by intoning the song "Surabaya Johnny." Bill, who is no longer able to conceal his true feelings for Lillian when she sings that "I still love you so," breaks down in tears. The passage's rhetorical handling of melodramatic affects draws attention to the peculiar relation between Hauptmann's prose and Brecht's songs in *Happy End*. It would be misleading to claim that Hauptmann's melodramatic text works against, or even undermines, Brecht's self-referential and ironic modernist aesthetic. Instead, Hauptmann's prose consistently foregrounds a tendency

that is latent in Brecht's plays but that is usually eclipsed in scholarship about epic drama. By creating a melodramatic context for Brecht's songs, *Happy End* makes it possible to read these lyrics for their appeal to the spectators' emotions, for their reliance on affective warmth as well as on sociocritical analysis and metadramatic self-awareness. Similar rhetorical effects are created for nearly all the songs in *Happy End*, including Lillian's first song, "Look all around you," whose overdrawn portrayal of Christian virtue ("Stop, stay right there! / People need help all around you— / Don't you even care?" [17]) rearticulates the celebration of female selflessness common in many theatrical and film melodramas.

The exchange between Bill and Lillian and the ensuing troubles illustrate the internal dialectic that creates opportunities for affective immersion and identification in *Happy End*. After the performance of "Surabaya Johnny," the lovers' bliss is once more under threat: as they hold each other, Bill and Lillian fail to notice that the Fly has overheard their conversation. Immediately after this scene, the Fly expels Bill from the group of gangsters, and Lillian is forced to leave the Salvation Army. The play intimates that Bill and Lillian have inadvertently become the victims of a hegemonic social order that does not tolerate the mingling of good and evil characters. But while *Happy End* resorts to images of frustrated love that characterized much theater and film melodrama, it also suggests that this rhetoric of victimization and suffering can in turn become a socially active force. By eliciting a sense of injustice, the play (like many of Brecht's political dramas in the 1920s) prompts its audience to contemplate the possibility of a future society in which the double standards of bourgeois morality will have been abolished. For this abstraction to work, spectators need to be able to step back and reflect on the sentimental scenes that are acted out onstage. The structures of identification in Brecht's plays have accordingly been

understood, to use Darko Suvin's phrase, as a "refusal of empathy" in favor of "*precisely graded and argued sympathy*." Brecht, in this account, pits distanced "feeling with" against the established theatrical logic of an immersive "feeling into" (64). In the passage quoted above, however, affective immersion trumps the estrangement effects deployed by Brecht and Hauptmann. The scene between Bill and Lillian (and *Happy End* more generally) creates a tension between epic theater's carefully measured sympathy and melodrama's emotional submersion, thus leaving room for the audience's empathetic identification with the two main characters.

The artistic strategies of estrangement that epic drama introduced to guard against affective absorption and theatrical illusionism are well known, but it is worth briefly recalling them here because in *Happy End* they enter into a curiously symbiotic relation with the emotional tactics of melodrama. As Benjamin points out in "What Is Epic Theater?" the idea of "gesture" (*Gestus*) lies at the center of Brecht's thinking about drama. In Brecht's antimimetic plays, Benjamin explains, gestures and utterances become self-reflexive to such a degree that they seem detached from the actors who perform them. Benjamin's essay invokes a scene from *Happy End* to elucidate "one of the substantial achievements of the epic theater": the art of "making gestures quotable." Benjamin refers his readers to a passage in the play where Lillian, after declaiming "Bilbao Song" in the gangsters' "beerhall," has to "quote this song and act out the gestures before a council of the Salvation Army" (151). This displacement of gestures from their original context, Benjamin argues, first makes them visible as theatrical kinesis. Brecht's technique of quotation reveals the theatricality of theater, the staginess of the staged action—an effect that is also intended by Brecht and Hauptmann's decision to give their play an English title pointing to the Hollywood film melodramas of the 1910s and 1920s.<sup>8</sup>

Brecht was writing the first significant theoretical conceptualizations of epic drama around the time of *Happy End*'s premiere, and the more robust pronouncements found in those essays have disguised the affective structures and the generic hybridity of Brecht's early epic plays. Most important, melodrama's deployment of exuberant emotionality already contained elements of estrangement. It was not epic drama's exclusive prerogative to upend the skillfully crafted illusion of artistic verisimilitude: "Melodramatic excess," as Jane Shattuc has observed, "stands as the precursor to Brechtian distanciation" (147). And melodrama's minimal concern for psychological realism likewise resonated with modernism's artistic decentering of subjectivity: "stylization itself," Brecht submitted apropos of his *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* (1931), "already introduces an element of antirealism" ("Zu: *Die heilige Johanna*" 105). These remarks suggest that the histrionic and affective aspects of melodrama, because they are obviously in excess of mimetic representation, draw attention to their own artificiality—even though melodrama more often than not succeeds in defusing and naturalizing these potentially estranging effects. The most striking instances of this oscillation between distance and absorption are the screens that are held up in *Happy End* and that provide ironic comments on the scenes onstage. These screens became a staple *V-Effekt* in Brecht's subsequent epic dramas, but their "distancing" effect in *Happy End* is curiously blunted. Indeed, the phrases projected onto Brecht and Hauptmann's screens ("A MYSTERIOUS GUEST!!"; "THE FATAL FLAME!"; "THE DESPAIR OF A LONELY CRIMINAL . . .") read like the intertitles used in many sensational film melodramas and melodramatic serials. As a result, these messages draw on melodrama's techniques of emotional absorption to highlight moments of emotional urgency, instead of undermining these techniques in the fashion propagated in Brecht's theoretical writings.



Contrary to what Benjamin's celebration of *Happy End* as a prototypical epic drama might lead us to expect, then, Brecht and Hauptmann's play repeatedly draws attention to the internal limitations and possible failures of artistic estrangement. *Happy End* is constantly working against the confines of its own literary form, but the authors' artistic wager with melodrama also entailed the possibility that the strategy of estrangement would be unable to outdo and defamiliarize the commodified affects of melodrama. Ironically, "Bilbao Song" is a case in point. The tunes of *The Threepenny Opera* had become hit songs in Weimar Germany, and audiences were humming along to them during performances; Weill's catchy tunes worked to suspend the irony and social satire of Brecht's lyrics, and Brecht had every reason to fear that "Bilbao Song" would become another apolitical *Schlager* ("popular song") among the middle-class audiences at the Schiffbauerdamm.

The title of Brecht and Hauptmann's drama already draws attention to the generic code that demands a harmonious conclusion, and the internal frictions that run through *Happy End*, between the heightened affective appeal of melodrama and an impulse that is essentially critical of it, become most clearly visible toward the end of the play. It was Brecht and Hauptmann's professed aim to expose and countermand the artificiality of an ending that happily unites the central characters in love. Brecht declared in his fierce attack on the studio system and on G. W. Pabst's 1931 film adaptation of *The Threepenny Opera* (which, he complained, had taken the political grit out of the play) that it was the promise of a "happy end" that made Hollywood films marketable to a mass audience (*Dreigroschenprozess* 485). Plot twists proliferate in the closing scene of *Happy End*, as the Fly recognizes Hannibal to be "my man" who "disappeared five years ago." This last recognition is characteristically self-reflexive: the Fly wonders, "[W]hat am I getting so sentimental about?"

(62). Furthermore, none of the bad omens that litter the plot of *Happy End*—for example, Bill at one point lights the Fly's cigarette, an action foreboding death elsewhere in the play—finally lead to disaster. Tragedy is fortuitously avoided, but the happy ending of the play also divulges an economic antagonism that is at once more dire and more real in its claim on the audience than any fictional tragedy. As the Fly notes in the last prose speech of the play, the true culprit in the drama (as in real life) is the capitalist system:

Our two groups have been fighting the same enemy all along. It's time to forget our little quarrels and stand together. Blasting open a safe is nothing—we've got to blast open the big gang that keeps the safe locked. So slip on your brass knuckles and learn where to hit! Robbing a bank's no crime compared to owning one! The world belongs to all of us—let's march together and make it our own! (69)

The play appears to transcend the conventional melodramatic antagonisms between good and evil as well as the affect-charged rhetoric of victimization that it enabled, yet it reproduces this opposition at a deeper level by revealing capitalism as the play's evil force. Brecht and Hauptmann make clear that capitalism has structured the moral discourse and narrative momentum of the play all along. As one of the criminals points out earlier in the play, the gang is forced to put up with increasing "competition" from other thugs that makes it ever more difficult "for a crook to earn a decent living" by organized crime (9). The rapprochement of Salvation Army and gangsters at the end of the play is also formulated on Fordist principles. "Don't forget the words of Henry Ford, that great man," the gangster Sam tells the Army Major. "He said: 'I consider every offer'" (38). When Bill and his gang ask to be allowed to join the Salvation Army, it is principally because "our line of work has suddenly gotten very uninteresting"—and, more significant, unprofitable (68).

The intense emotionality of *Happy End*'s finale—the comradeship between thugs and Salvation Army and the reunion of the lovers—is intended to lend credence to the communist imperative to oppose capitalism. The song that closes the play's published version is especially poised between sentimental cliché and critique, for it shows Brecht (who wrote these lines) trying to put the affective energies of melodrama at the service of a revolutionary politics. The chorus-like song is addressed to the audience, and its function is to open out the happy ending by extending the anticapitalist call to arms into the world of the audience: "If all of you will swear to stand together," all characters enjoin the spectators, "Forget your fears and march with us today" (70). The concluding song of *The Threepenny Opera* had been more explicit in its attack on the idea of aesthetic closure: "Now we've got our happy ending / Everything is on the mend / Yes, the man with lots of money / He can buy a happy end" (67). Unlike the coda of *The Threepenny Opera*, Brecht's emotional address to the audience in *Happy End*—"Forward march, chin up, take weapons, prepare! / You who need help, keep your hopes up, we're coming, we care!" (70)—is essentially melodramatic in its invocation of the suffering victims of capitalist exploitation. The effect of the stirring last scene, with its blend of melodramatic affects and revolutionary politics, is (to adapt Fredric Jameson's phrase) to "'estrangle' or 'defamiliarize' the so-called estrangement-effect in its turn" (39). On Jameson's reading, the recognition of kitsch's artificiality enabled by Brecht's dramas creates a space in which sentimental affects may be safely enjoyed by the audience. With a view to *Happy End*, it would be more accurate to say that the play's ending fails to create an ironic distance between Brecht's revolutionary politics (and the estrangement effects of epic drama, which were intended to support it) and the affective tactics of melodrama (which appeared to offer the image of a false social

totality). The drama's last lines in particular are uncomfortably lodged between a view of the revolutionary struggle as ongoing in the present and the gratifying illusion of closure afforded by the melodramatic happy ending.

There are indications that Brecht found the ending of *Happy End* artistically unsatisfying and ideologically inconclusive.<sup>9</sup> The editor of the play's English version, Michael Feingold, observes that the drama resulted in a theatrical scandal when Helene Weigel's declamation of the Lady in Grey's final speech "aroused violent booing and whistling from the expensive seats." Drawing on contemporary accounts of the performance, Feingold surmises that Weigel "improvised a diatribe against capitalism" or "pulled a notorious Communist Party broadside from the pocket of her costume and began to harangue the audience with excerpts from it" (viii).<sup>10</sup> It does not ultimately matter which of these versions is historically accurate. The attempt to impose a communist meaning on the play testifies to Brecht's and Weigel's fears that the text's ideological message might be smothered by the artificiality of an ostentatiously "happy" ending. Brecht's diatribe against Pabst's commercial *Threepenny* film can help to shed light on *Happy End*'s ideological and artistic double bind of conformity and resistance. Brecht insisted that it was necessary to preserve the commodity character of art in the context of revolutionary literature: "Some say that film differs from other works of art in that it is more obviously a commodity. . . . Apparently, nobody can imagine that this way of entering circulation might be advantageous for art" (*Dreigroschenprozess* 474). *Happy End* similarly attempts to incorporate melodrama's commodified affects into the structures of modernist drama. The play suggests that Brecht and Hauptmann hoped to negate the negativity of bourgeois-capitalist false consciousness on its own terms by blowing melodramatic sentimentality out of proportion. As Brecht noted regarding *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1930), "the term



‘opera’ should not be changed,” in the hope that the “unreasonable, unreal, and unserious, if put in the right place, will transcend itself [*sich selbst aufheben*] through a double meaning” (“Zu: *Aufstieg und Fall*” 77); and the parallel aim of *Happy End* was, as Hauptmann later recalled, to “discredit the series of overblown Hollywood happy endings by writing our own super-gigantic happy ending [*Super-gigant-Happy-End*]” (245). As Brecht and Hauptmann’s *V-Effekte* blur into the established patterns of melodrama, however, the intended dialectical forward movement of the play begins to double back on itself in the manner described in Adorno’s *Three Studies*. *Happy End* thus illustrates a process of cultural osmosis by which the apparently anachronistic form of melodrama, instead of being dialectically superseded by a new modernist aesthetic, acquired new life in the changed artistic environment of the 1920s and 1930s.

It is important to recognize that Brecht and Hauptmann sought to devise a dramatic mode that could convey modernist irony as well as affective sincerity, even if their attempts at an artistic integration of the two turned out to be unstable and inconclusive. Brecht’s artistic development after the financial failure of *Happy End* indicates the desire to find a radical solution to the dilemma of having to mediate between commercial demand and political message. In his *Lehrstücke* (“learning plays”), Brecht attempted to cut the Gordian knot by creating theatrical performances that no longer required any spectators. Beginning with *Der Ozeanflug* (1929), the *Lehrstücke* signaled a retreat from theater’s conventional modes of address: the plays’ declared aim was to educate not an audience but only the actors who were performing the play.

### “We” and “I”: *On the Frontier* and Sentimentality

By comparing *Happy End* and *On the Frontier*, I do not mean to suggest that these plays

present identical ideological and artistic viewpoints or that they put affect to quite the same theatrical use. I rather want to draw attention to a wider literary-historical configuration in which certain modes of low- and middlebrow drama coincided with a modernist theater that professed to be more explicitly political. This being said, there were of course important (biographical and artistic) points of contact between the work of Brecht and that of Auden and Isherwood. Isherwood and Auden had lived in Berlin in 1929, and it is likely that they saw *The Threepenny Opera* during their stay in the city. Isherwood translated the verse passages in Brecht’s *Dreigroschenroman* for its 1937 English publication (*A Penny for the Poor*), and given his interest in cinema it is also likely that he saw Pabst’s 1931 film adaptation of the play. As Peter Parker has pointed out, the influence of Brecht and Weill’s plays makes itself felt especially in Auden and Isherwood’s first seriocomic collaboration, *The Dog beneath the Skin* (315). It is even possible, although this is far more conjectural, that the criminal character Babyface in the discarded first version of *On the Frontier* was inspired by the thuggish Babyface of *Happy End*.<sup>11</sup>

*On the Frontier* makes use of the clear-cut morality, the pathos, and the happy endings of much melodrama, even as it tries (like *Happy End*) to harness these formal means to new radical political ends. Yet the differences between the uses of affect in the two plays are at least as instructive as these similarities. While the ending of Brecht and Hauptmann’s play aimed to forge a community of revolutionaries, Auden and Isherwood were skeptical of such attempts to subordinate individuality to collectivist projects. The engagement with melodramatic affect in *On the Frontier* was motivated in part by Auden’s immersion in the psychoanalytic theories of Homer Lane and John Layard in the late 1920s and the 1930s. If society was to be reformed, Lane and Layard suggested, it was necessary to liberate the minds and feelings

of the individuals who constituted that society—and Auden’s poems and essays in the 1930s variously remark on the “change of heart” that had to precede the socialist revolution (*English Auden* 36, 89; “Good Life” 112). “A society consists of a certain number of individuals living in a particular way, in a particular place, at a particular time; nothing else,” Auden elaborated in an article from 1938 (“Morality” 479). Written in the same year, *On the Frontier* also envisions the society of the future not as a homogenized collective but as a union of solidary individuals.

Auden and Isherwood had written *On the Frontier* for production by the London Group Theatre in 1938. Group Theatre had been founded in 1932 by the director Rupert Doone and the visual artist Robert Medley, and although it lacked its own venue it attracted some of the decade’s greatest literary talent, including T. S. Eliot, Stephen Spender, and Louis MacNeice. Group Theatre, Valentine Cunningham has noted, “import[ed] something of the avant-garde European stylization, the punchy satire, the political edge, together with the idea of the acting commune” (322). Brecht had visited the company after leaving Germany in 1933 and had been “greatly impressed,” as Medley recalled in his memoirs, by a performance of Auden’s *The Dance of Death* (135). The company’s most resounding artistic and commercial successes, however, were its productions of Auden and Isherwood’s plays *The Dog beneath the Skin* (1935) and *The Ascent of F6* (1937).

The plot of *On the Frontier* turns on the conflict between Westland (governed by a Hitlerite “Leader”) and the kingdom of Ostnia. As the conflict spins toward hot war, it is made clear that the political fate of Westland is being cunningly manipulated by a third major player, the armaments manufacturer Valerian.<sup>12</sup> The outbreak of war at the end of the play precipitates a workers’ revolt that is celebrated as an anticipation of “Fascist Collapse” (663). Intertwined with this grand po-

litical narrative is a love story between Eric Thorvald, son of a Westland professor, and Anna Vrodny, granddaughter of a retired colonel in the Ostnian army. The plot that narrates the story of the lovers gives the impression of being temporarily detached from the course of the political action, opening up a space in which the sentimental articulation of a different kind of life and a different kind of community becomes possible. Anna and Eric never meet in real life, but they encounter each other twice in a spiritual-utopian “good place” on the Ostnia-Westland frontier (388)—a “spotlight illuminat[ing] a small area in the middle of the stage” (387). The last of their meetings, after Eric has been fatally wounded in the war, closes the play.

While Brecht and Hauptmann struggled against the confines of their chosen form, Auden and Isherwood are more comfortable in embracing melodrama’s affective exuberance. The relative ease with which *On the Frontier* incorporates melodramatic elements into a *communisant* plot points to the historical moment from which the play emerged. The antifascist Popular Front, which gained hold in Europe and the United States during the mid-1930s, facilitated exchanges across ideological divides and made communist ideology accessible to artistic formulations that lay outside the officially decreed aesthetic of socialist realism. Finally, the use of sentimentality by left-wing writers seemed sanctioned in Britain by the numerous proletarian fictions that made use of melodramatic plots, from Walter Greenwood’s *Love on the Dole* (1932) and Lewis Grassic Gibbon’s *A Scots Quair* (1934) to Walter Brierley’s *Means-Test Man* (1935). Yet despite the aesthetic liberalism of the mid-1930s, *On the Frontier* is also awkwardly caught between its political and commercial ambitions. Medley, who designed the stage props for the play, remembered later that the attempt to replicate the success of *The Ascent of F6* was hamstrung because it involved “squar[ing] the circle, and mak[ing]



a play in their [Auden and Isherwood's] convention which would also prove a commercial success" (139). Even though the play eventually debuted at Group Theatre, Auden and Isherwood had briefly considered producing it in the West End, and the drama is clearly shaped by the attempt to cater to West End tastes. Like the hugely popular domestic-realist melodramas that influenced Brecht, *On the Frontier* elicits intense pathos by forging a narrative of victimization in which weaker members of society suffer at the hands of a corrupt patriarchal order. The attack on pre-World War II realpolitik is conveyed in the scenes between Valerian, the Leader, and the soldier Grimm, yet none of these morally ambivalent figures is able to equal the youthful lovers Eric and Anna as objects of sympathetic identification. Britten's music further underscores the prominence of the love plot: all the lovers' encounters are accompanied by a dreamy piano music that supports the mood of these scenes, instead of working consistently against it in the manner demanded by Brecht.<sup>13</sup> By contrast, the plot that is concerned with high politics is largely devoid of melodramatic appeals to the audience's emotions, and when the conversation between Valerian and the steel magnate Stahl does touch on the imminent revolution, Valerian is quick to exhort his interlocutor, "Aren't we becoming rather melodramatic?" (369).

Anna and Eric are the only figures who succeed in outgrowing the moral, emotional, and intellectual limitations of their social environment. Most important, their empathy is capable of transcending the intense political conflict that dominates the play. When Eric is told by his fascist aunt to "apologize to [a painting of] the Leader" for an irreverent joke, he turns to the painting and reflects, "Tell me, what is it you really want? Why do you make that fierce face? You're not fierce, really. . . . Are you lonely, are you unhappy, behind that alarming beard? Yes, I see you are. Perhaps you only want love—like me . . ." (379). It is

later revealed that Eric's recognition of the Leader's personality is accurate, as the Leader pleads with his advisers not to "leave me, any of you[.] I hate to be alone" (395). Anna, like Eric, embodies the ability to rise beyond the confines of the self, drawing into affective proximity what is spatially distant. When war breaks out, she imagines the screams of the Westland soldiers and appeals to her mother, who "hear[s] nothing": "can't you hear them over there? They're crying, they're suffering—just like us!" (401). While Anna's and Eric's acts of empathy fail to avert public and private disaster in the play, their capacity for affective identification dramatizes, and becomes a model for, the logic of sentimental immersion that governs *On the Frontier*'s own melodramatic address to its audience.

*On the Frontier* often gives the impression of having been pieced together from various artistic models, and the play's composition clearly indicates Auden and Isherwood's wish to create an affective rapport with their middle-class audience at Group Theatre. The couplets that are sung by the workers before the play starts, for example, are addressed to a "Johnny," whose name evokes the womanizing "Surabaya Johnny" of *The Threepenny Opera*. In similar fashion, the chorus of prisoners leading up to act 2 recalls Giuseppe Verdi's *prigionieri* choir in *Nabucco*, while the plot of the star-crossed lovers Eric and Anna (overshadowed by the feudal "history of a thousand years" [390]) is modeled on *Romeo and Juliet*. It would be wrong, however, to see the derivativeness of the play simply as a shortcoming. Rather, the constructedness of *On the Frontier* points to the internal logic of the melodramatic mode, which places less emphasis on technical innovation than on the audience's ability to anticipate dramatic situations and to respond to them accordingly. The predictability of the play's melodramatic love plot ensures the legibility of powerful emotions, even in moments when it threatens to become histrionically self-conscious.

As in *Happy End*, the fullest engagement with the sentimental and expressive rhetoric of melodrama comes in the closing scene between Anna and Eric. The short scene, set “before the curtain,” that serves as a prelude to the final interaction between the lovers presents “five male members of the chorus” as “typical readers of five English newspapers” (663). The headlines that are read out—“Workers rising everywhere,” “Workers deal smashing blow to international Fascism”—expand the scope of the play by introducing broader social developments. By the time the last scene commences, it has become clear that the Anna-and-Eric subplot acts as a metaphor for the overarching historical superplot that looks forward to a worldwide solidarity among workers: “in the lucky guarded future,” Eric tells Anna during their last encounter, “Others like us shall meet, the frontier gone, / And find the real world happy” (417). The ending of *On the Frontier* provides a structural analogue to Marxist predictions of a better and more just society, but the play’s utopian anticipation of a socialist future is affective rather than crudely mimetic. Instead of attempting to represent a future political constellation, Auden and Isherwood ask us to feel the revolutionary excitement that signals the possibility of such a future.

The anticipation of the proletarian revolution in *On the Frontier* comes about abruptly, as does the final meeting of Anna and Eric in the otherworldly space “on the frontier” between Ostnia and Westland. The sentimentality of the ending—the lovers are separated in life and death, but they are bound to each other spiritually—contrasts markedly with the analytic orientation of *Happy End* and that play’s keen attunement to the vaster economic substructure of capitalism. It is also significantly ironic that Auden and Isherwood—whose political allegiances in the 1930s were notoriously divided between their middle-class upbringing and a desire to “go over” to the working class—attempted to turn

a bourgeois love plot (between the children of a colonel and a professor) into a symbol for the workers’ revolution.<sup>14</sup> In *On the Frontier*, even more than in *Happy End*, the internalization of conflicts in the love story runs the risk of eclipsing the play’s political satire. It is relevant in this context that the two authors felt the need to flag the historical and social implications of their play by interspersing their drama with choruses sung by prisoners, workers, and soldiers. As the ending of *On the Frontier* makes clear, though, Auden and Isherwood’s main dramatic interest was not directed toward historical grand narratives. Instead of concluding their melodrama with another didactic song, the last scene grants full articulation to the emotions of the love plot.

*On the Frontier* illustrates the authors’ conviction that personal psychology offered the key to a truly radical politics. The central difficulty with this position was how political collectives could change social reality without infringing on the essential freedom of its individual members. In “The Good Life,” a text from 1935, Auden commented that “[i]f we regard the environment as static, then the problem is one of modifying our desires; if we take the organism as static, one of modifying the environment. Religion and psychology begin with the first; science and politics with the second” (109). From this vantage point, theater was positioned midway between individual “psychology” and radical “politics”: its ability to change the social “environment” lay precisely in its appeal to the latent “desires” of each spectator. Because it addressed itself at once to the associative community of the audience and to the emotions of each spectator, theater (unlike poetry or fiction) could intimate what it was like to be transported out of the confines of the historical present and to feel exhilaration at the prospect of a future in which individuality and collectivity would at last be reconciled.

Auden and Isherwood’s negotiations of (melodramatic) affect did not take place in a



theoretical vacuum. Their drama responds to a line of British Marxist aesthetics that emphasized not only the inculcation of Marxist ideologemes but also the need to reform spectators' emotions. The injunction to unleash revolutionary "sentimentality" was given its most prominent articulation in *Crisis and Criticism* (1937), by the communist critic Alick West. The book's opening essay, "'We' and 'I,'" invoked two words—"romantic" and "sentimental"—to describe the kind of writing that anticipated the proletarian revolution. Socialist literature could foreshadow the withering away of obsolete social norms by conveying the overcoming of "the 'we' of the ordinary bourgeois world and the discovery beneath it, with a thrill of metaphysical awe, of a deeper, elemental 'we'" (19). This shift from society understood as an agglomeration of monadic individuals to a genuinely communist public would involve "the abandonment of . . . character in the old sense" and the formation of a "new spirit of unity" (19, 22). West's conflation of Marxist and Freudian vocabulary speaks directly to Auden and Isherwood's concerns in *On the Frontier*: "the inhibition of emotion with which we are concerned is a part of class exploitation" (56).

But West's comments also pointed a way out of false consciousness by insisting that an emotional truth lay "beneath" bourgeois conventions. The task West envisioned for left-wing writers was to wrest literary forms from the bourgeois tradition with which they had been associated and to use them to create a more democratic and demotic art.<sup>15</sup> Echoing West's injunction, *On the Frontier* enlists melodramatic affects as a way of communicating experiences located at the threshold between the capitalist present and a (post)revolutionary future. As in *Happy End*, these affects possess a double structure: they had to remain legible to an audience that was still predominantly bourgeois, but they were also supposed to transport this audience beyond the limitations of its historical moment. The two parts of this model

cohabit incongruously in the modernist melodrama of the late 1920s and the 1930s, and my readings of *On the Frontier* and *Happy End* have sketched two signally different responses to the dilemma posed by this double structure of feeling. While Brecht and Hauptmann's play exhibits the difficulties that modernist writers encountered in inhabiting and reinventing popular theatrical forms, Auden and Isherwood's drama espouses the "campy" aesthetic of melodrama more fully, even at the risk of perpetuating bourgeois ideology (Brooks ix). When it is compared with the finale of Brecht and Hauptmann's play, the conclusion of *On the Frontier* seems less awkward precisely because it is more awkward—it fits in more successfully with the melodramatic mode because it evinces less "inhibition" (in West's phrase) about its sentimentality.

### Moving beyond the Happy End

The affective spectacle envisioned by Auden and Isherwood and in more fraught ways by Brecht and Hauptmann promises to temporarily suspend the isolation of spectators from one another through a collective emotional response. But the two plays also negotiate a dialectical backward movement in which the modernist negation of theatrical conventions runs the risk of being drawn back into bourgeois false consciousness and false feeling. The tonal ambiguities characterizing the two dramas are perhaps most fully described in Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope*, a work written over the course of the 1930s and 1940s. In a chapter ("Happy End, Seen through and Yet Still Defended") that invokes Brecht's epic theater several times, Bloch contends that while the "happy end" "has become shallower than at any other time" owing to a deluge of sentimental Hollywood films, this was "only one side of illusion": "More than once the fiction of a happy end, when it seized the will, . . . reformed a bit of the world; that is: an initial fiction was made real. The con-

sciousness . . . enters into the struggle for the happy end, which already senses itself, almost announces itself in the dissatisfaction with what is available" (443–44). The descriptions offered by Bloch and West suggest that the affects called up by happy endings are utopian and potentially revolutionary because they involve an element of anticipatory awareness—what Bloch calls "defiance and hope" (444). In similar fashion, Brecht and Hauptmann as well as Auden and Isherwood aim to make their happy endings transitive, to make them point beyond themselves; the authors do not pretend to heal social and political division, but they do stage the first step in an ongoing historical struggle. *Happy End* and *On the Frontier* suggest that one way to "revolutionize" melodramatic affect was to blow it out of proportion, to drive out excess with more excess, but they also hint that it was impossible to ascertain at which point cliché would turn into critique, or critique into cliché.

The opposition between kitsch and irony, cliché and demystification, has long been central to critical accounts of modernist writing. However, the neat complementarity of these terms has tended to conceal that modernist experimentation inflected but never displaced a fundamental recognition of the social and artistic significance of affect. As Brecht affirmed in the mid-1920s, "[T]here are powerful [*wirksame*] films that have an effect on people even if they find them to be kitsch" ("Über den Film"). Reconstructive readings seeking to describe the modernist uses of affect will therefore need to modify critical paradigms that view modernist writing as essentially ironic and self-reflexive. Prompted by Adorno's suggestion in *Three Studies*, a fruitful way of decentering existing accounts of modernist aesthetics is to focus on artistic developments located on what is apparently the temporal and formal periphery of high modernism. Such a readjustment of critical focus—for example, toward the politicized modernism of the

late 1920s and the 1930s—makes it possible to reconfigure what modernism signifies as a set of aesthetic protocols that were capable of change and that could not be entirely detached from earlier modes of writing, thinking, and feeling. From such a vantage point, the affective structures of *Happy End* and *On the Frontier* can be recognized not as aesthetic anomalies but as indicators of a significant aspect of modernist literature that has hitherto been marginalized.

## NOTES

I want to thank Katharina Boehm, who was the most involved reader of this essay. All unattributed translations are mine.

1. The attribution of the authorship of *Happy End* is complicated. According to Paula Hanssen, "contributions from Brecht and Hauptmann are intertwined" in the play: Brecht contributed the songs, while Hauptmann apparently wrote the prose (42). Both later cowrote a film scenario based on the drama. This article refers to *Happy End* as a play by Brecht and Hauptmann; I refer to Brecht only when discussing the play in the context of his development as a writer for, and theoretician of, the theater.

2. *Modernism*, of course, designates different sets of poetic assumptions depending on its national and biographical context. The beginning of this article maps the artistic ground that Brecht and Hauptmann shared with Auden and Isherwood, while my discussion of the plays will say more about their differences.

3. For influential statements of this position, see Cunningham 47–55 and Hynes 17–37.

4. I borrow "bad modernism" from Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz's eponymous essay collection, where the term denotes, among other figures, "less widely known women writers, authors of mass cultural fiction, makers of the Harlem Renaissance, . . . and other cultural producers hitherto seen as neglecting or resisting modernist innovation" (1).

5. Adorno's belief that high art could dialectically transcend kitsch was shared by Benjamin, who argued, in a fragment of the *Arcades* project composed in the late 1920s, that "for developing living forms, what matters is that they have within them something stirring, useful, ultimately heartening—that they take 'kitsch' dialectically up into themselves, and hence bring themselves near to the masses while yet surmounting the kitsch" (395). It is indicative of an entrenched critical prejudice against "commodified" feeling that some of the most incisive crit-



ics of aesthetic affect continue to feel awkward about the intense pathos of melodrama in the context of twentieth-century avant-garde writing: "The power of melodrama," Charles Altieri writes, "is one clear indication of how we can become affectively absorbed without referring that absorption to our own constructive activity" (271).

6. Critics have only recently begun to investigate how modernists thematized affect as a category fundamental to their work. This includes discussions of Karl Kraus as "pathetischer Satiriker" (Dachselt 245–98), of Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Rainer Maria Rilke (Winko 212–88), and of early film melodrama (Meyer-Sickendiek 201–20; Kappelhoff). Risi and Roselt's volume of essays focuses on the affective economies of theater. There have also been a few endeavors toward a historical poetics of affect in anglophone modernism (Cuda; Flatley; See). Modernist drama, with its unstable negotiations of theatricality and antitheatricality, emotive and intellectual content, has much to offer that can be of interest to the affective turn in literary and cultural studies. For the purposes of my argument, I will disregard the root differentiation between "emotion" as "a psychological, at least minimally interpretive experience" and "affect" as emotion's "physiological aspect" (Terada 4). As will become clear, however, my reading of modernist melodrama agrees with the insight shared by many recent theoreticians that feelings are "fundamentally 'social'" (Ngai 25; see also Clough and Halley). In this article I frequently use the term *sentimentality* to designate this facet of melodrama, although I do not want to suggest that it exhaustively describes melodrama's complex affective structures.

7. Following Peter Brooks's psychoanalytic and largely ahistorical account of melodrama, scholars long argued that the form is best understood as a modality rather than a coherent genre (e.g., Gledhill; Williams). By contrast, this article builds on more recent attempts to grasp the historical and generic specificity of the form.

8. It is likely that the name of a central character in *Happy End*, the Lady in Grey, looks back to one of these kitsch films, James Vincent's sensationalist serial *A Woman in Grey*.

9. Klaus Völker refers to Brecht's "ideological qualms" ("ideologische Bedenken") concerning the play (153).

10. I am grateful to Jan Knopf for discussing *Happy End*'s performance history with me.

11. For a discussion of the earlier version, see Mendelson's editorial afterword (654–60).

12. The allusion is once more to Hitler, who was often held, in the early and mid-1930s, to be a political puppet of the heads of German industry.

13. I am grateful to Nick Clark at the Britten-Pears Library and Archive, Aldeburgh, for information on Britten's unpublished score. The reciprocity between Auden and Isherwood's text and Britten's music can also cast a fresh light on the collaborations of Brecht and Weill. In an excellent discussion, Daniel Albright has argued that the major innovation in Weill's early work consisted in

a complex rejection of modernist irony. Weill's use of sentimental tunes, his unabashed appeal to the popular-musical tastes of middle-class audiences, Albright argues, is rooted in "an irony that is ironic about its own ironicalness" and "that inhabits a threshold space between derision and warmth" (274). Albright's argument is characteristic of a widespread critical ambivalence toward (melodramatic) affect, insisting as it does that Weill achieves warmth by way of a doubly ironic (and therefore doubly modernist) structure. Instead of suggesting that sentimentality needs to be rescued aesthetically, the present article proposes that affect constitutes a more positive value in modernist art than is commonly acknowledged.

14. Isherwood's retrospective comments about *The Ascent of F6* reflect the same dilemma: "we were serious and yet not serious," he remarked in an interview; the play "was extremely aggressive towards the whole theatrical convention and yet again, it was making use of that convention" (Finney 162).

15. Christopher Caudwell, whose *Illusion and Reality* Auden had extolled in the left-wing magazine *New Verse* in 1937, argued similarly that the artist is an "individualist" who "explores new seas of feeling . . . dragging into the social world realms at present non-social" (109).

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# Cross-Colonial Poetics: *Souffles-Anfas* and the Figure of Palestine

OLIVIA C. HARRISON

## Other-Thought

**F**RANTZ FANON FAMOUSLY CONCLUDED HIS CLASSIC WORK ON COLONIALISM and decolonization, *Les damnés de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*), by calling for the Third World to leave Europe behind and forge a new path for itself: “Allons camarades, le jeu européen est définitivement terminé, il faut trouver autre chose” (“Come, comrades, the European game is finally over, we must look for something else”; 302; 236). A lengthy analysis and condemnation of the physical and psychological violence of colonial rule, *Les damnés de la terre* is more than a call to bear arms against the colonizers—*pace* Jean-Paul Sartre, whose introduction would lead many critics to characterize Fanon first and foremost as a theoretician of violence. The most powerful and lasting contribution of Fanon’s magnum opus remains his call to reverse and undo colonial violence through a complete overhaul of thought, an epistemic break that would topple the colonial regime of domination not only in the political realm but also in the psyche of the colonized and in culture at large. For Fanon this did not signify a return to tradition or what he called “coutume” (“custom”; 212; 160), the reified, fossilized product of a stultified culture that was the fruit of colonial, orientalist fantasies. To the contrary, he called on the formerly colonized world to cease imitating its old masters and develop “une pensée neuve” (“a new way of thinking”; 305; 239) at the antipodes of exoticized tradition. Published posthumously in 1961, months before Algeria obtained its independence from France, Fanon’s plea to “look for something else” has profound implications for the study of postcolonial literature from the former French colonies in North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia).

Writing in the early 1980s, the Moroccan sociologist and writer Abdelkebir Khatibi cited Fanon at the incipit of his seminal essay

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“Pensée-autre,” which similarly calls for a “double critique” of Western and Maghrebi traditions, extending his earlier analysis of literature to discuss the sociological and philosophical implications of “other-thought” (*Maghreb pluriel* 11–12).<sup>1</sup> The literary genealogy of Khatibi’s notion of double critique is of central importance given his reflection on the forms and languages of critique in this essay. As a writer and literary critic, Khatibi played an important role in elaborating and theorizing new literary forms in Morocco and the rest of the Maghreb. In 1968 he published one of the first monographs on Maghrebi literature, *Le roman maghrébin* (“The Maghrebi Novel”), where he examined the question of literary form in relation to European literary models. Following the lead of his mentor Albert Memmi, the renowned Tunisian writer, sociologist, and critic, he noted the paradox according to which Maghrebi writers addressed the theme of acculturation in a form, the novel, that was itself a “factor” of acculturation (67).<sup>2</sup> For Khatibi, only the Algerian novelists Kateb Yacine and Mohammed Dib had succeeded in transforming the form and structure, not just the thematic content, of the novel. Khatibi’s literary oeuvre as well as that of his contemporaries would seek to resolve this paradox through formal experimentation, in an attempt to produce literary forms (genres, languages, modes of production and circulation) that were not tributaries of French culture.

Fanon’s and Khatibi’s calls to “look for something else” invite us to rethink the way we approach Maghrebi and, more generally, postcolonial literature and culture. Many anti- and postcolonial Maghrebi writers, including the contributors to the Moroccan cultural journal *Souffles-Anfas*—among them, Khatibi—attempted to elaborate literary forms that did not duplicate French or Arabic canons. What are the implications of what Khatibi calls “other-thought” for the reception and criticism of such works? Most studies of Maghrebi literature have approached the question of lit-

erary form by examining Maghrebi writers’ subversions of the French language, European genres, and literary canons and by aiming their critique at French literary forms.<sup>3</sup> While these studies have been pivotal in countering Francocentric views that neglected Maghrebi literature entirely or considered it a subcategory of French literature, they nevertheless maintain this literature within the orbit of French letters, albeit conceived as a counter-model. By doing so, they also mask literary relations that fall outside the France-Maghreb binary. In this article I propose to analyze one such relation, that tying the Maghreb to Palestine. I argue that in a number of ways, Palestine functioned as a literary interlocutor that was neither European nor Maghrebi yet offered a model for political and aesthetic revolution in the postcolonial Maghreb.

From the mid-1960s onward, Maghrebi writers represented Palestine in poetry, plays, novels, and essays for a range of political reasons—most obviously, out of solidarity with Palestine. Though writers were more or less careful to distinguish between European settler and exploitation colonies, protectorates, and mandates and Zionism and Israeli expansionism, they nevertheless identified with Palestine on the basis of a shared experience of colonial rule, broadly conceived, thereby contributing to a transnational body of work produced in other parts of the formerly colonized Arab and Muslim worlds.<sup>4</sup> Though this rhetorical turn to Palestine was articulated at the height of pan-Arabism, it was not exclusively based on Arab solidarity and differs in important respects from Mashreqi representations of Palestine. Maghrebi writers turned to Palestine in order to reexamine the Maghreb’s colonial past and drew parallels with the Palestinian question in a number of domains, such as acculturation and linguistic assimilation, as well as what one might call French minority politics, the policies designed to separate Maghrebi minorities (Berber, Kabyle, Jewish, etc.) from the majority, designated as



Arab.<sup>5</sup> The differential treatment of Jews and Muslims comes under particular scrutiny in the work of the Moroccan writer Edmond Amran El Maleh, for example, which investigates the effects of French minority politics on Jewish-Muslim relations in North Africa, as well as the ways in which they intersect with Jewish-Muslim relations in the Levant and France. Other works, such as Kateb's popular Algerian dialect theater, mobilized Palestine to critique the persistence of colonial discourse in the postcolonial era (e.g., French attitudes toward Algerian immigrants) or to expose new forms of political hegemony, be it foreign control—what was being theorized as neocolonialism—or postcolonial state repression.

Yet if Palestine took on pressing importance for Maghrebi writers in the postcolonial period, it was not only as a symbol of revolutionary politics—though this was an important dimension of this cross-colonial relation. Palestine also served as a point of reference in these writers' formal explorations and as a fulcrum for discussions of language (French and Arabic, but also Tamazight, or "Berber") and cultural autonomy. In this article I begin excavating the complex ways in which Palestine was invoked in discussions of Maghrebi literature and culture through a close reading of the experimental journal *Souffles* and its companion Arabic-language journal, *Anfas*.<sup>6</sup> The first text to explicitly link Maghrebi culture and politics to the Palestinian question, *Souffles-Anfas* captures and exemplifies the central importance of Palestine in the postcolonial Maghreb.

### "We Are All Palestinian Refugees"

I begin with a poem by Abdellatif Laâbi, a cofounder and the editor in chief of *Souffles-Anfas*, published in *Souffles* 15, a special issue titled *Pour la révolution palestinienne* ("For the Palestinian Revolution"). Though "Nous sommes tous des réfugiés palestiniens" ("We Are All Palestinian Refugees") was composed in French, it marks a clear realignment to-

ward the Middle East and specifically Palestine, seen as the vanguard of the Arab people. Before turning eastward, however, the poet begins with an introspective evocation of the "scars" and "grafts" tattooed on his body, illustrating the close connection between (post)colonial violence in the Maghreb and the plight of Palestinian refugees:

je remerge [sic] enfin de mon corps  
j'en ressors porteur de questions essentielles . . .  
. . . . .  
j'ai . . . [l]a mémoire longue . . . Les cicatrices  
et les greffes . . . alourdissent ma marche  
mais n'empêchent plus mon expansion  
j'avais longtemps rêvé C'était des cauchemars  
Courses au ralenti d'exécutions répétitives  
Œils tournoyants Manifestations à brûlures d'opium . . . Foules  
érotiques et païennes en pratiques obsessionnelles  
C'était des nuits en grossesses de lunes  
Astres éteints Déserts rutilants . . .  
Faces marquées au rouge Vents cataclysmiques L'Atlas  
éruptif en déluge de mémoire collective (80)

at last I remerge [sic] from my body  
I come out of it bearing essential questions . . .  
. . . . .  
my . . . memory is long . . . Scars and grafts  
. . . weigh down my step but no longer stop my expansion  
for a long time I dreamed It was night-mares  
Slow-motion races of repetitive executions  
Whirling eyes Opium-burned demonstrations . . .  
Erotic and pagan crowds practicing obsessive rituals  
It was nights pregnant with moons Unlit stars  
Glimmering deserts . . . Branded faces  
Cataclysmic winds The Atlas erupting in a deluge of collective memory

The medical and bodily metaphors punctuating this passage ("grafts," "scars," "burns," "branded faces") refer to the physical and psychological violence of colonization, as evidenced by the recurrence of these images in essays on colonial assimilation and acculturation published in *Souffles-Anfas* (e.g., Laâbi,

“Réalités” 10 and “Réalités . . . II” 31). Here the poet’s colonized body expands to join the collective Moroccan body politic in a cathartic expression of pain. But this nightmarish vision is first and foremost one of postcolonial state violence. Like Laâbi’s long book-poem, *L’œil et la nuit* (“The Eye and the Night”), which was published the same year (1969), the overture of “Nous sommes tous des réfugiés palestiniens” evokes an event that deeply marked the poets of *Souffles-Anfas*: the violent repression of peaceful student demonstrators in Casablanca on 23 March 1965. An attack on the Moroccan people and in particular on its youth, this event symbolically marked the beginning of the “Years of Lead,” as the repressive regime of Hassan II (1962–99) came to be known.<sup>7</sup>

Surprisingly, however, this evocation of postcolonial violence leads to a triumphant invocation of Palestine in both poems. If Laâbi makes the connection between Moroccan and Palestinian resistance explicit in *L’œil et la nuit* through the use of dates and paratexts,<sup>8</sup> “Nous sommes tous des réfugiés palestiniens” performs it through metaphor, heralding the figure of the Palestinian guerrilla fighter, the *fida’i* (lit., “martyr”), as an emblem of popular Arab resistance against colonial and autocratic regimes. The shift from “I” to “we” embodies this cross-colonial identification as the poem gradually expands from the first person singular to the Moroccan people and then to a collective Arab identity refashioned through the *fida’i*. It ends by sketching an “itinerary of violence” from the poet’s subjection to anticolonial revolt, symbolically captured in the name Palestine:

mémoire . . . Tu m’as dicté l’itinéraire de  
violence . . .  
. . . . .  
je remerge [sic] enfin de mon corps  
. . . . .  
je suis l’homme arabe dans l’Histoire  
chantier en branle remis à neuf par  
l’avant-garde des guérilleros palestiniens  
  
arabe arabes arabe  
un nom à retenir

. . . . .  
aujourd’hui  
NOUS  
SOMMES  
TOUS  
DES  
REFUGIES  
PALESTINIENS  
demain  
c’est nous qui créerons  
DEUX... TROIS... QUINZE PALESTINE  
(80–81)

memory . . . You dictated to me the  
itinerary of violence . . .  
. . . . .  
at last I remerge [sic] from my body  
. . . . .  
I am the Arab man in History set in motion  
built anew by the vanguard of  
Palestinian guerrilla fighters  
  
Arab Arabs Arab  
a name to be remembered  
. . . . .  
today  
WE  
ARE  
ALL  
PALESTINIAN  
REFUGEES  
tomorrow  
we will create  
TWO . . . THREE . . . FIFTEEN PALESTINES

The metaphor of the title, repeated in the poem’s triumphant conclusion, performs an identification that seems to collapse the Moroccan and Palestinian peoples, united in a pan-Arab front spanning West and East. At the same time, however, Palestine does not merely stand in for Morocco in this poem. More is at play here, as indicated by several transnational references that exceed the scope of the Maghreb and Palestine.

The first is the title, which cites a famous slogan chanted in Paris in the spring of 1968, “Nous sommes tous des juifs allemands” (“We are all German Jews”), and rewrites it in the



context of anticolonial revolt. The capitalized letters and cascading layout of the page bring the poem to a climax with this revolutionary slogan, culminating in a response to Che Guevara's message to the Tricontinental, "Create Two, Three . . . many Vietnams."<sup>9</sup> "Nous sommes tous des réfugiés palestiniens" is in this sense a period piece, reflecting the transnational character of May '68 and the centrality of anticolonial and Third Worldist thought to this event. It is also a document of pan-Arab fervor, forged in the wake of the Arab-Israeli war of June 1967 and the "discovery" of Palestine then—an event I will discuss at greater length in a moment. For now, I want to pause on this simultaneous articulation of an internationalist leftist and a pan-Arab or Arab nationalist discourse. How do these two discourses coexist and overlap in Laâbi's poem?

Edward Said has written about the use of "Palestine as a rallying cry" in Egypt and Iran in the 1970s, when students chanted "We are all Palestinians" to protest postcolonial state repression (125). The recent and ongoing prodemocracy movements in Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria and across the Middle East and Maghreb articulate such cross-colonial affiliations in the slogans "Kuluna tunisiyun/misriyun" ("We are all Tunisian/Egyptian") and "Al-sh'ab yurid iskat al-nitham" ("The people want to bring down the regime") and in variations on *kifaya* ("enough") and *irhal* and *dégage* ("leave" in Arabic and French), reiterated from Tunisia to Bahrain. Similarly, Spanish and Greek citizens inspired by the Arab spring have taken on the call to indignation initiated by the French *résistant* Stéphane Hessel to protest drastic European austerity measures. These heterogeneous transnational protests share a common denominator, not so much their content or message (though one could argue that as well) but their use of metaphor. Although these examples are not symmetrical, a similar identification is at work, or rather what Jacques Rancière terms a *dis-identification*: the "impossible identification"

"we are all German Jews" or "we are all Palestinian refugees" shores up the gap between subject and object of metaphor, "we" and the other, marking a break from state discourse and national identity ("Cause" 29).

Rancière brings these disparate examples—May '68 and cross-colonial identification—together in his writings on disidentification. Though he first uses this expression in *La méésentente* ("Disagreement") with reference to the slogan "we are all German Jews" (187), he fully develops the notion of disidentification in "The Cause of the Other," in the context of the Algerian war. For Rancière, the brutal police crackdown against peaceful Algerian protesters demonstrating in Paris on 17 October 1961, and even more so the cover-up that followed, led French citizens to disidentify with the state, which was killing Algerians in their name. It is particularly fitting that what he terms disidentification occurs, in this context, in transnational fashion, allying French citizens to Algerian subjects of France. Similarly, Kristen Ross uses the concept of disidentification to discuss the importance of the Algerian war of independence (1954–62) in the buildup to May '68 in France, arguing for the centrality of transnational alliances to this event (10–11). In a different form, context, and register, Laâbi's poem points to the importance of transversal relations in the imagination and vocalization of anticolonial revolt. I would like to go further and suggest that the unlikely alliance between the French, on the one hand, and German Jews and Algerians, on the other, and the Moroccan-Palestinian alliance performed in Laâbi's poem are more similar than one might think. If May '68 can be interpreted, as Ross and others suggest, as a postcolonial event—the fight was no longer *outremer*, in the colonies, but at home—"We are all Palestinian refugees" also gives voice to the profound disillusionment of the postcolonial era, when the enemy was no longer Europe or America but the postcolonial state. Here Palestine functions as a rallying cry that enables disidentification

with, and popular revolt against, authoritarian and neocolonial regimes.

At the same time, though, when the revolutionary slogan “We are all Palestinian refugees” appears in Laâbi’s poem, it has to be read differently, not only for content but also for form and style. Here I propose to read the metaphor of the title, the catachrestic declaration “Nous sommes tous des réfugiés palestiniens,” as an example of impossible identification. If, for Rancière, French citizens refused to identify with the French state, he insists that they nevertheless could not identify with the Algerians killed in their name, and he explores the residual gaps between state and citizen, citizen and subject, as sites of nonidentitarian politics. If Rancière is attached to the nonidentity of the French and the Algerians—and, in *La mésentente*, of the French and the German Jews—it is because disidentification allows for political affiliation without identitarian impulses. To paraphrase his argument, the French may have chosen to represent Algerian subjects against the French state, but they could not claim to fully speak for them.

Without reducing Laâbi’s poem to an illustration of disidentification, I want to parse the ways in which it reveals Morocco and Palestine to be nonidentical, asymmetrical terms, even as it attempts to perform this alliance through metaphor. The question immediately posed to the reader at the outset of the poem is, Who is “we”? Given the references not only to pan-Arabism but also to May ’68, Cuba, and Vietnam, the answer is not evident. The first part of the poem gives us a series of clues. It begins not with “we” but with “I”: “je remerge enfin de mon corps / j’en ressors porteur de questions essentielles” (“at last I remerge from my body / I come out of it bearing essential questions”). As we have seen, this lyrical “I” expands to join the collective body of the Moroccan masses: “Les cicatrices et les greffes . . . alourdissent ma marche mais n’empêchent plus mon expansion” (“Scars and grafts . . . weigh down my step but no longer stop my ex-

pansion”). It is significant that this transformation occurs through memory, first individual, then collective: “j’ai . . . [l]a mémoire longue” (“my . . . memory is long”) becomes “L’Atlas éruptif en déluge de mémoire collective” (“The Atlas erupting in a deluge of collective memory”) as the scars and grafts on the poet’s body give way to “nightmares” of violent demonstrations (“Manifestations à brûlures d’opium”) and tortured or burned faces (“Faces marquées au rouge”). Yet this memory is not just a Moroccan memory, consolidating a postcolonial national identity against state discourse. To use Michael Rothberg’s terminology, what emerges from this poem is a form of “multi-directional memory,”<sup>10</sup> tying the memory of colonial and postcolonial violence in Morocco to that of Palestinian refugees. Without ever naming France, Israel, or the Moroccan state, “Nous sommes tous des réfugiés palestiniens” establishes cross-colonial parallels and alliances between the Moroccan and Palestinian (but also Vietnamese and Cuban) masses, adopting a transnational liberatory discourse that bypasses the colonizer-colonized binary altogether. The movement of the poem from a victimized “I” to a combative “we,” from postcolonial Morocco to colonized Palestine can be read as an allegory or *mise en abyme* of the figuration of Palestine in *Souffles-Anfas* and of the ways in which it was woven into debates on language and form in the Maghreb.

### Cultural Decolonization

Ten years after Moroccan independence and exactly one year after the protests of March 1965, Laâbi joined the francophone poets Mostafa Nissaboury, Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, Bernard Jakobiak, Hamid El Houadri, and Mohammed Fatha in launching a quarterly journal titled *Souffles* (“Breaths”).<sup>11</sup> Founded as a venue for experimental francophone poetry, from the second issue onward *Souffles* published articles on popular theater, film, and art, and it quickly became a platform for



debates ranging from national culture and language to the continued effects of what its founders called “la science coloniale” (“colonial science”) on artistic and scholarly endeavors in postcolonial Morocco.<sup>12</sup> In an editorial published in the fourth issue of *Souffles*, Laâbi coined an expression that captures the journal’s cultural and political aim: “la décolonisation culturelle” (“cultural decolonization”), the elaboration of literary and artistic forms that would break with French canons without seeking a return to tradition, which Laâbi, like Fanon before him, identified as a colonial construct (“Réalités” 5). The journal became increasingly political as its editors in chief, Laâbi and, after 1968, the leftist militant Abraham Serfaty, adopted an explicitly Marxist-Leninist agenda, publishing articles on domestic issues ranging from education reforms to miners’ strikes and culminating in the founding of a political party, Ilal-Amam (“Forward”), in 1970. At the same time, the journal grew more international and internationalist, publishing key texts such as “Vers un troisième cinéma” (“Toward a Third Cinema”), a manifesto by the Argentine directors Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas, and the Black Panthers’ ten-point program (“Programme”), alongside articles on neocolonialism in Africa and liberation struggles in Vietnam and Palestine. In this sense, *Souffles-Anfas* constitutes an archive of what, following Khatibi, we might call “decolonial” literature (*Maghreb pluriel* 15). It was also instrumental in introducing a Moroccan and Maghrebi readership to foundational anti- and postcolonial texts, by writers from the anticolonial theorists Frantz Fanon and Amílcar Cabral to the Haitian writer René Depestre and the Palestinian poet Mahmud Darwish. Given the journal’s overtly leftist and oppositional stance, it is surprising it survived as long as it did, at the height of state censorship and repression. After twenty-two issues of *Souffles* and eight issues of *Anfas*, which was founded in 1971, both journals were banned. In 1972 Laâbi and Serfaty were

arrested, tortured, and imprisoned, Laâbi for eight years and Serfaty for seventeen, putting an end to the *Souffles-Anfas* adventure.<sup>13</sup>

In part because of this singular and high-profile political trajectory, critics have tended to look at *Souffles-Anfas* in a national (Moroccan) or at best regional (Maghrebi) framework, neglecting its transnational or cross-colonial dimensions. They have also tended to focus on the early, more literary issues of *Souffles*—the avant-garde poetry review rather than the Marxist-Leninist journal.<sup>14</sup> We must, of course, consider the specificities of Morocco’s political, cultural, and linguistic landscape to grasp the significance of *Souffles-Anfas* on the Moroccan political stage and also, more largely, in Maghrebi literature. The first issues of *Souffles* clearly position the journal on the Moroccan and Maghrebi cultural scenes, breaking with what it characterizes as “official pseudo-literature,” or salon literature (Laâbi, “Lisez” 5), and challenging predecessors such as Albert Memmi and Malek Haddad, who famously prophesied the death of francophone Maghrebi literature (Laâbi, “Prologue” 2). The journal’s analyses of Maghrebi writers, such as Driss Chraïbi, Kateb Yacine, and Rachid Boudjedra, and its editorials on the role of the French language in Morocco make clear the journal’s commitment to decolonizing Maghrebi culture, a stance it could not and did not take with regard to sub-Saharan African literature, for example. As we will see, it also played a pioneering role in promoting dialogue between Arabic- and French-language writers in Morocco as well as the Maghreb. At the same time, however, *Souffles-Anfas* connected these national and regional debates on language and literature to a larger, cross-colonial context—most centrally, to Palestine. Two areas in particular were brought into dialogue with Palestine in the journal: language and poetic form. Before addressing these two areas of cross-colonial exchange, however, I need to briefly discuss the significance of Palestine in *Souffles-Anfas* and in the Maghreb at this time.

It is not a coincidence that Palestine played such a pivotal role in the journal. *Souffles* was founded just before the event that would make the Palestinian question known in the Maghreb and indeed the world: the Six-Day War, the Arab-Israeli conflict that began on 5 June 1967 and culminated in Israel's annexation of Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. The journal bears the imprint of this event and of the heady days of pan-Arab and Arab-nationalist sentiment that followed what is known in Arabic as *al-naksa*, the reversal. "Nous sommes tous des réfugiés palestiniens" is to be read in this vein, as a call to arms addressed to the Arab people as a whole. If the protests of 23 March 1965 were a foundational trauma for *Souffles-Anfas* at the national level, 5 June 1967 was its equivalent at the level of the "Arab nation," which became a rubric in the journal after the special issue on Palestine. The ubiquitous image of the *fida'i* donning his characteristic checkered headgear, the *kouffieh*, and carrying a Kalashnikov is typical of the pan-Arab iconography of the 1960s and reappears throughout *Souffles-Anfas* from the special issue on Palestine onward, reactualizing the concept of resistance in the era of postcolonial disillusionment through a masculinist, militarized embodiment of anticolonialism.<sup>15</sup>

Despite this strong affiliation with pan-Arabism, however, *Souffles-Anfas* is markedly different from what is known as *adab al-hazima*, or literature of defeat, a new genre that emerged after the June 1967 war. Coined by the Syrian philosopher Sadeq Jalal al-Azm in an essay titled *Al-naqd al-thati ba'd al-hazima* ("Autocritique after the Defeat"), this expression designates a heterogeneous corpus occasioned by the crushing defeat of June 1967, seen not as a singular military reversal but as marking the decline of Arab civilization broadly speaking. Joseph Massad convincingly argues that this discourse of Arab decline reprises orientalist clichés (e.g., that of the Ottoman empire as "the sick man of Europe"), producing a self-

orientalizing picture of the Arab world as a decadent civilization (*Desiring Arabs* 16–29).<sup>16</sup> In contrast to this corpus, the editorial of *Souffles* 6, published immediately after the war, marks the journal's distance from invocations of patriotism, condemning instead what it describes as a colonial war and warning against Arab states' recuperation of nationalist sentiments ("Avant-dire" 1–2). This skepticism vis-à-vis state articulations of Arab nationalism distinguishes *Souffles-Anfas* from *adab al-hazima*. It also exemplifies one of the central uses to which the emerging question of Palestine was put in the Maghreb, as a vector of protest against postcolonial Arab regimes. In this sense the journal articulates an idiosyncratic version of pan-Arabism, reprising Fanon and Cabral as well as Marxist-Leninist precepts in the postcolonial context. Unlike the authors of *adab al-hazima*, *Souffles-Anfas* also turned toward Palestine as opposed to the Arab world at large. The move was a nonidentitarian one, or what I am calling an impossible metaphor, complicating what might seem to be a homogeneous Arab identity (the "Arabs" of Laâbi's poem) through a specific cross-colonial relation.

### Linguistic Guerrilla Warfare

Paralleling this turn to Palestine, the journal shifted toward the Arabic language. Without claiming a directly causal link between these two movements, I argue that the journal's reorientation toward Palestine intersected with its shift to Arabic, often explicitly so. From the outset, the turn to Arabic was connected to the Palestinian question. While as late as 1970 Laâbi continued to defend the use of French and what he called "terrorist literature" ("Littérature maghrébine" 36),<sup>17</sup> the journal progressively turned toward Arabic, starting with translations between Arabic and French. In 1968 *Souffles* published a French translation of a work by the Syrian poet Adonis, "Le manifeste du 5 juin 1967" ("Manifesto of 5 June 1967"). Using *al-naksa* as a



pretext for decolonizing “la pensée arabe contemporaine” (“contemporary Arab thought”), this text is in some sense an example of *adab al-hazima*, a fierce critique of “suivisme” (“mimicry” 5) and a call to invent “le nouvel homme arabe” (a “new Arab being” 10) capable of original, nonderivative thought (10).<sup>18</sup> But as even this brief characterization shows, Adonis’s text also echoes Fanon’s (and anticipates Khatibi’s) call to invent “something else,” an other-thought that would bypass European and traditional modes of thinking. Accordingly, *Souffles-Anfas* presented Adonis’s manifesto as an avant-garde, decolonial text, closer to the journal’s aesthetic and to its political agenda than the occasional literature it decried. By publishing this text, the editors of the journal explained, they hoped to bridge the gap between Middle East and Maghreb, restoring the links between two regions that had been cleft by colonialism yet found common cause in the wake of June 1967. Like *Souffles-Anfas*, “Le manifeste du 5 juin 1967” was aimed at cultural decolonization of the Arab world at large (1).

This practice of crosslinguistic exchange continued with a series of bilingual issues featuring French- and Arabic-language poems and other texts (*Souffles* 10–11, 12, and 13–14) that also sought to decolonize linguistic borders and redraw the map of Maghrebi literature (Laâbi, “Prologue” 1–2). Because French and Arabic scripts are written and read in opposite directions, the bilingual reader could read the journal from either end. This crosslinguistic enterprise lasted until the special issue on Palestine, which, though entirely written in or translated into French, urged francophone and arabophone writers to come together around the Palestinian question. This call for cross-colonial solidarity went hand in hand with a call for cultural unity. *Souffles* 15 called for the integration of francophone and arabophone Maghrebi literature into “la littérature arabe” (Arab or Arabic literature) in the name of Palestine, which required,

spécialement de la part des écrivains maghrébins de langue française (si cela n’a pas encore été fait), une réorientation géo-culturelle radicale dans le sens du développement du dialogue et de la confrontation avec les créateurs du Machreq arabe afin de parvenir à imprimer dans les faits que notre littérature, quelle que soit sa langue d’expression, et dans cette phase précise de décolonisation, fait partie intégrante de la littérature arabe, avec laquelle son destin est de toute manière lié. (“Appel” 100)

especially on the part of francophone Maghrebi writers (if they have not done so already), a radical geocultural reorientation toward the development of a dialogue and confrontation with creators from the Arab Mashreq, in order to give substance to the fact that no matter what language we use, in this precise phase of decolonization our literature is part and parcel of Arab(ic) literature, to which its destiny is in any case linked.

In the wake of *al-naksa*, the borders drawn between Maghreb and Mashreq had become irrelevant. Maghrebi literature was now fully a part of what the signatories of the appeal called “Arab(ic) literature,” playing on the polysemy of both the French adjective *arabe* and the Arabic adjective ‘*arabi*(ya). In this reading, Palestine was not only at the forefront of popular revolt in the Arab world, it also led the way in renewing Arab(ic) literature in all languages. To effect this cross-colonial link between Maghreb and Palestine, the appeal drew an explicit parallel between Israel’s “cultural annihilation” of Palestine on the one hand and the “deculturation” of the Maghreb on the other (102). What *Souffles-Anfas* called “cultural neocolonialism”—the metropolitan monopoly on the publication, marketing, and distribution of literary works—had stifled Moroccan literary production not only in the colonial era but also in the postcolonial period (100). Instead of calling for a purely militant literature, *Souffles-Anfas* asserted that the Palestinian revolution had made formal experimentation more urgent than ever (101).

*Souffles* 15 also marked a shift in the journal's content and format, reflecting the politicization of the journal from 1968 onward. In the prologue of the Palestine issue, the editors announced a "new orientation" away from exclusively literary concerns, which they now deemed a "luxury," initiating a dialogue with artists and intellectuals from the rest of the Arab world and Third World ("Au lecteur" 1). After this issue, the journal adopted a different layout, new rubrics (including "The Arab Nation"), and a more politics-heavy, revolutionary content.<sup>19</sup> The transition to Arabic was presented as an outcome or corollary of the shift toward political issues and as an explicitly political gesture. For *Souffles-Anfas*, the Palestinian question required the full decolonization of Maghrebi culture, beginning with the turn to Arabic, which would put an end to "linguistic alienation" (Laâbi, "Avant-propos" 2). In his prologue to *Souffles* 22, which would be the last issue of the francophone journal, Laâbi announced the creation of *Anfas* ("Breaths" in Arabic) a few months earlier,<sup>20</sup> explaining that henceforth it would be the journal's privileged venue. Written in a style, language, and form accessible to the arabophone peoples of Morocco, the rest of the Maghreb, and the Mashreq and dedicated to issues affecting the Arab world ("Avant-propos" 2–3), *Anfas* would achieve the liberation of the masses "from Palestine to the Western Sahara."<sup>21</sup>

*Anfas* did not solve the problem of accessibility, however. It is indeed surprising that *Souffles-Anfas* rarely discussed the inordinately high rates of illiteracy and the prevalence of Tamazight in Morocco.<sup>22</sup> If the majority of Moroccans spoke the local Arabic dialect, Darija, or Tamazight, only a small fraction could read standard Arabic. The pan-Arab inflection of the journal partly explains this double omission, a fact that would be leveled against it during the rise of the Berber movements in the 1980s (Bounfour). Yet while it may seem puzzling that *Souffles-Anfas* should choose standard Arabic as a tool of democra-

tization, this radical language choice was in line with the push for arabicization across the Maghreb in the postcolonial period, a movement that was in fact premised on developing literacy, but in Arabic rather than French.<sup>23</sup> The creation of *Anfas* corresponds to a regional movement of cultural decolonization, to use the journal's terminology, aimed at developing an autonomous Maghrebi culture in Arabic. And though *Souffles-Anfas* was careful to insist on the plural cultures of Morocco, including its Berber, Jewish, and sub-Saharan African traditions (Association de Recherche Culturelle 7), it nevertheless aligned with official Maghrebi policies and discourses regarding standard Arabic as the sole national language.

Notwithstanding this sidelining of Morocco's non-Arab and oral cultures, the journal's adoption of Arabic remains paradoxical for another important reason. Starting in *Souffles* 15, it proclaimed the need to privilege political over cultural matters. Yet this is also when it shifted to Arabic, implementing its most radical strategy of cultural decolonization to date. It is true that the issue of language choice was (and remains) a political concern in the Maghreb. In *Souffles-Anfas*, however, it went hand in hand with a reflection on aesthetic form. The prevalence of poetry and art in the special issue on Palestine betrays the persistence of formal preoccupations in the journal and coincides with a turn or return to poetry—but this time to anticolonial Palestinian poetry rather than avant-garde Moroccan and Maghrebi poetry. While *Souffles-Anfas* emphasized the revolutionary potential and political force of this corpus, it also reinvestigated questions of poetic form that had been central to the early *Souffles*, reviving, instead of sidelining, aesthetic concerns in the context of revolutionary anticolonial literature.

### Translating Palestine

In 1969 Laâbi began translating Palestinian poetry, starting with a poem by Samih al-



Qassim, “Le 5 juin” (“5 June”), first published in *Souffles* 15, and culminating in an anthology of Palestinian poetry, *La poésie palestinienne de combat* (1970; “Palestinian Combat Poetry”). The works included in this anthology—by al-Qassim, Darwish, Fadwa Touqan, and others—have been categorized by the Palestinian writer and literary critic Ghasan Kanafani as *adab al-muqawama* (“resistance literature”). The most famous example of this genre is undoubtedly Darwish’s poem “Bitaqat hawiya” (“Identity Card”), first published in 1964 in Darwish’s *Awraq al-zaytun* (“The Leaves of the Olive Tree”), whose interpellation “Sajil: ana ‘arabi” (“Record: I am Arab”) reclaims and subverts the identity imposed by the occupier. The poet’s proclamation of patience and vigilant anger translate the resistance of the Palestinian people and their willingness to fight for their land and dignity. Palestinian resistance poetry, or what Laâbi, following Fanon, dubs “combat poetry,” had a powerful impact on Laâbi’s post-1967 poetry, in particular on the protest poems he would write in prison.<sup>24</sup> In fact, it was in prison that Laâbi first disseminated his translations of Palestinian poetry, introducing his fellow inmates to this incandescent corpus and surreptitiously establishing an ironic parallel between Israeli prisons and the jails of Hassan II (Slyomovics 3–4). This practice of dissident poetry reading constitutes perhaps the most tangible use of Palestine for the purposes of postcolonial protest in Morocco, demonstrating the potent political message carried by a heterogeneous anticolonial liberation struggle. Closer examination of Laâbi’s translations also reveals that he was as concerned with the form as with the content of resistance, strengthening the links between his earlier formal explorations and those of Palestinian poets.

Laâbi’s presentation of Palestinian poetry focused on two points that betray a specifically decolonial, Maghrebi approach to the Palestinian question. The first aspect he

foregrounded was the poems’ resistance to Israel, in particular to cultural assimilation and deculturation, through the use of popular forms and the Arabic language. Comparing Maghrebi and Palestinian experiences of “cultural annihilation,” he also drew a parallel between the cultural renewal sparked by Maghrebi and Palestinian writers, characterizing them both as a *nahda*, or renaissance (*Poésie* 14, 26). This attention to the use of Arabic and popular forms against a hegemonic language, in this case Hebrew, echoes the journal’s discussion of linguistic guerrilla warfare in French and the shift to Arabic in the Maghreb. Yet Laâbi went much further in discussing the use of dialect and popular forms in Palestinian poetry than he did in *Souffles-Anfas* or in his own poetry, where, as Jacqueline Kaye and Abdelhamid Zoubir have noted, orality remains allegorical.<sup>25</sup> For Laâbi, one of the main contributions of Palestinian poetry was its use and articulation of popular culture, which allowed it not only to trump Israeli efforts at acculturation, effectively decolonizing Palestinian culture, but also to translate and produce popular culture, serving as a trigger and ferment in the elaboration of a decolonial Palestinian culture (“Poésie” 61–62).

The second aspect of Palestinian poetry Laâbi highlighted was its formal experimentation. Here the parallel with discussions of literary form in the early *Souffles* is even more striking. According to Laâbi, Palestinian poets were creating a new Arab(ic) literature, forged in anticolonial struggle but not reducible to it. Instead of following poetic conventions, they were revolutionizing the Arab(ic) canon from within. Though Laâbi did not make this connection explicit, it is clear that his fascination with Palestinian poetry stemmed from the questions that drove him and his fellow poets to found *Souffles* in the first place: the need to elaborate new literary and cultural forms, to produce a decolonial culture. What was different about Palestinian

poetry, however, was that it was composed in Arabic, not French. At a time when *Souffles-Anfas* had left French and francophone poetry behind, it shifted its attention to Palestinian poetry in Arabic, a vanguard that was simultaneously political and aesthetic.

Laâbi's note on translation following his introduction to the anthology made explicit the goals of this poetic chiasmus. Clarifying his position as a poet-translator, Laâbi contrasted his engagement with Palestinian poetry to an orientalist tradition that would seek to render Palestinian poetry into the "«génie» de la langue [française]" ("distinctive nature" of the [French] language") for "un public amateur de couleur locale et de folklore" ("a public fond of local color and folklore"). On the contrary, it was as a militantly anticolonial poet addressing the colonized and oppressed masses that Laâbi translated Palestinian resistance poetry: "Aussi avons-nous essayé de comprendre de l'intérieur, en tant que poète arabe nous-même, les œuvres de nos frères palestiniens et d'en restituer la voix, le souffle, l'exigence profonde . . ." ("This is why, as an Arab poet myself, I have tried to understand the work of our Palestinian brothers from within and restore its voice, its breath, its profound exigency . . ."; *Poésie* 31). Yet this act of transmission also translated anticolonial resistance into a colonial-imperial tongue. One might argue that, paradoxically, the translation of combat poetry enabled a return to linguistic guerrilla warfare, in French.

Deploying a poetics similar to that of *Souffles-Anfas*, Laâbi's translations enable a copresence of (and comparison between) Palestinian and Maghrebi, Arabic and French anticolonial poetry, weaving a cross-regional, crosslinguistic political solidarity into the translated text. Unlike the poetry of *Souffles-Anfas*, however, Darwish's linguistic guerrilla warfare is conducted in Arabic, performing the identity claimed by the poet and imposing a foreign mode of communication on the colonizer: "Sajil: ana 'arabi" ("Record: I am

Arab"). In a sense, the journal's turn toward Palestinian resistance poetry can be read as an attempt to develop a decolonial culture in Arabic at a time when it had set aside its previous explorations in "terrorist literature." This displacement of the journal's project into the Palestinian context partly constituted an attempt to resolve the language crisis, which had become untenable in the light of renewed forms of colonialism. At the same time, however, the metaphor of, comparison with, and translation of Palestine served to revive the journal's own efforts at cultural decolonization. Like the publication of Adonis's manifesto, the translation of Palestinian Arabic poetry into a francophone Maghrebi text performed a cross-regional, crosslinguistic gesture—precisely the kind of move that Laâbi had termed *decolonial*.

### Palestine as Metaphor

The turn to Palestine in *Souffles-Anfas* allowed a reinvestigation of questions of formal experimentation and cultural decolonization that had been posed in early issues of the journal. This is what I call cross-colonial poetics: the unexpected literary effects of political solidarities, from one (post)colonial context to another. Reading *Souffles-Anfas* without taking into account such links misses what I think is one of its most interesting contributions: the attempt to found a decolonial Maghrebi culture in dialogue with cross-colonial figures, especially Palestine. The first venue that explicitly made this link, *Souffles-Anfas* gives voice to many of the preoccupations that would lead Maghrebi writers such as Kateb, Khatibi, El Maleh, and Ahlam Mosteghanemi to represent Palestine in their works, with vastly different aims and effects. Yet I would like to suggest that these excavated cross-colonial links represent more than an archive of transversal literary relations. They also require that we reconsider our literary cartographies, de-



centering the France-Maghreb axis that still frames Maghreb studies to sketch alternative and equally significant genealogies. Such a reorientation does not merely displace the center-periphery model but also reveals the centrality of apparently exogenous contexts in a nonhierarchical, multipolar literary map.

At the same time, however, the figuration of Palestine in Maghrebi literature poses a number of problems, not least the use of a third figure to effect the cultural decolonization of the Maghreb—whether in a text such as *Souffles-Anfas* or in my own reading of it. I want to conclude by evoking the dangers—and, I contend, the possibilities—inherent in such a cross-colonial reading. If Laâbi went so far as to give Palestine a voice through translation, this figure remains elusive in the journal, raising the important question of the politics of representing—and identifying with—the other. Where is Palestine in this cross-colonial cartography?

In his seminal essay *The Question of Palestine*, Edward Said theorizes the significance of Palestine from a global perspective. Starting from the concrete fact that Palestine is a “nonplace” (124)—in national-political terms, Palestine does not exist, making the struggle of the Palestinians topical in the etymological sense of the word—he explores the metaphoric potential of Palestine as utopia (from the Greek *ou-topos*, “non-place”), evoking its force as a symbol of emancipation in anticolonial and popular struggles across the globe. Although Said does not state this explicitly, Palestine is also topical in the sense that it has become a topos, or commonplace, in liberation discourses ranging from American civil rights movements to French antiracist demonstrations, from student protests in the Arab world to anti-imperialist formations in Latin America.<sup>26</sup> Darwish has compellingly spoken of Palestine as a metaphor for both Palestinians and Israelis (*Palestine* 148), and I would argue that this analysis can be extended to those who invoke Palestine in their diverse

struggles. I want to investigate this second sense of the root word *topos*, supplementing Said’s description of Palestine as a “rallying cry” through the study of what I am calling the figure of Palestine.<sup>27</sup> If Palestine represented a utopia of sorts in the Maghreb and became a topos of liberation, it was not just topical, in the usual sense of the term—that is, current and epiphenomenal. The turn to Palestine was enmeshed in the social, political, and cultural fabric of the postcolonial Maghreb.

It may seem particularly problematic to suggest that a people’s striving for national sovereignty might serve to advance cultural decolonization elsewhere. Yet this catachrestic use of Palestine provides one formulation of what Said considers the utopian dimension of Palestine. The example of popular Palestinian resistance recalls the moment of potentiality that preceded independence and the disillusionment that came with what Fanon presciently named “the pitfalls of national consciousness” in the eponymous third chapter of *Les damnés de la terre*. In a sense, Palestine enabled Maghrebi writers to articulate a relational, contestatory identity, one that was at the antipodes of existing models in the formerly colonized world. By figuring Palestine in the Maghreb, they produced a more complex picture of Maghrebi identity than certain essentialist Moroccan, Algerian, and Tunisian nationalist discourses might lead us to expect, one that was based on solidarity with a heterogeneous struggle, on an impossible metaphor. As my reading of *Souffles-Anfas* shows, this agentival, nonidentitarian formulation of identity results from the cross-colonial, relational nature of this endeavor and from its literary and poetic dimensions.

In this sense, the metaphor of Palestine is remarkably similar to Khatibi’s conception of the Maghreb as a “horizon of thought.” In “Le Maghreb comme horizon de pensée” (“The Maghreb as Horizon of Thought”), an early version of the essay “Pensée-autre,” Khatibi formulates a new conception of tradition, not

as a static past but as “le devenir de ce qui est oublié” (“the becoming of what is forgotten”; *Penser* 123) in dialogue with the multiple others that have traversed the Maghreb. In “Pensée-autre,” Khatibi develops this critique of identitarian discourse by unraveling the binary thinking that opposes tradition to modernity and a glorious past to a decadent present—the type of thinking correctly diagnosed as self-orientalizing by Massad—and suggests that the name *Maghreb* (the Arabic word for Morocco) serve as a figure for a relational future. Playing on the root of the term *maghreb*, *gh-r-b* (which designates foreignness, strangeness, exile, and the west), he advocates an other-thought in relation to Western and Eastern cultures.<sup>28</sup> Arguing that colonization has made insular thinking impossible, he contends that decolonization provides a “chance,” or opportunity, to perform a double critique of self and other that leads to alternative modes of thinking (*Maghreb pluriel* 16): “Pensée-autre, celle du non-retour à l’inertie des fondements de notre être. *Maghreb*, ici, désigne le nom de cet écart, de ce non-retour . . .” (“Other-thought, one of non-return to the inertia of the foundations of our being. Here *Maghreb* designates the name of this distance, of this nonreturn . . .”; 12). Khatibi’s independent Morocco and Said’s yet-to-be-realized Palestine may be far apart, but it is clear that both thinkers are concerned with developing nonidentitarian ways to invent “something else”: political and aesthetic forms that are not imported wholesale from East or West but that might provide alternatives to binary thinking. Khatibi’s text further suggests that one of these alternatives might be the cross-colonial relation between the Maghreb and Palestine.

Khatibi’s critique of identitarian discourses is not merely aimed at engaging in a dialogue with “des pensées occidentales de la différence” (“Western philosophies of difference”), as he calls them: those of Friedrich Nietzsche, Maurice Blanchot, and Jacques

Derrida, for example (*Maghreb pluriel* 20). In “Le Maghreb comme horizon de pensée,” he also condemns the foreclosure of other types of relation, in particular the relation with Palestine. In a clear reference to the event known as Black September, the Jordanian army’s massacre of Palestinians in September 1971, Khatibi warns of the dangers of *repli sur soi*, or “insularity,” even, or perhaps especially, in the so-called Arab world: “Au nom de l’unité communautaire des Arabes,” he writes, “on massacre la Palestine” (“In the name of the communitarian unity of Arabs, Palestine is massacred”; *Penser* 135). If Khatibi does not cite this example of identity-based politics in “Pensée-autre,” which was written a decade later, it nevertheless haunts his critique of identitarian violence and his plea for relationality.<sup>29</sup> Envisaging the Maghreb as a horizon of thought, he looks to Palestine as an overture at the other end of the spectrum, a Mashreq or easternmost point to orient thought toward another horizon.

Notwithstanding Khatibi’s plea for cross-colonial relationality, it is important to emphasize that the literary representation of Palestine does not provide a concrete solution to the increasingly intractable problem of Palestinian national sovereignty. Nor can this literary practice of representation “decolonize” Maghrebi culture in any simple way, as if the turn to Palestine sufficed to recast cultural and political alignments in the manner of geopolitical relations. Rather, it raises unsettling questions: What impact, if any, can South-South alliances have on specific political struggles? To what extent do cross-regional literary exchanges reconfigure patterns governing the circulation of cultural capital? Without muting the problematic nature of such questions, I argue that at a time of renewed transversal alliances but also in the context of an increasingly deadlocked situation in Palestine-Israel, it is more crucial than ever to extract the political potential of these diverse practices of representation. *Souffles-Anfas* gestures toward the



possibility of a cross-colonial poetics of resistance, one that produces literary and cultural forms outside the colonizer-colonized binary yet aims to undo residual and emerging forms of colonial domination, “from Palestine to the Western Sahara.”

## NOTES

1. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
2. Memmi famously characterized the situation of the francophone Maghrebi writer, forced to write in the language of the colonizer, as untenable, going so far as to proclaim the death of francophone Maghrebi literature (130).
3. See Déjeux for a brief overview of Maghrebi literary criticism from the 1950s to the early 1990s (232–35). Gontard’s 1981 study of “textual violence” in francophone Moroccan writing remains a key reference for the study of subversive literary practices in Morocco.
4. See, e.g., the writings of the Urdu poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Lebanese novelist Elias Khoury, Egyptian playwright Yusuf Idriss, and Syrian playwright Sa’dallah Wannus, among others.
5. It is important to emphasize that these categories are not discrete: Berber populations might adhere to the Muslim, Jewish, or Christian faith, for example. On the opposition of Berber and Arab identities in Morocco and Algeria, see Gellner and Micaud; Lorcin. For an excellent analysis of the European genealogy of the categories Jew and Arab, see Anidjar.
6. I use the hyphenated expression *Souffles-Anfas* to refer to the journal as a whole and *Souffles* or *Anfas* for individual issues of the journal. All issues of *Souffles* and *Anfas* are available on the Web site of the Bibliothèque Nationale du Royaume du Maroc (bnm.bnm.ma:86/ListeVol.aspx?IDC=3).
7. Rollinde describes the postcolonial generation as the “generation of ’65,” emphasizing the symbolic importance of 23 March (120–26). For a firsthand account of this event, see Daoud 103–04.
8. The first edition of *L’œil et la nuit* ends with “Rabat 1967,” given as the place and date of writing, while the preface to the 1982 edition emphasizes the importance of March 1965 in the narrative, tracing an arc between the “battle” of March 1965 and the war of June 1967 (7, 11). Laâbi clarified this connection in the revised 2003 edition by inserting “1965” and “June” at the end of the text.
9. “Create Two, Three . . . Many Vietnams, That’s the Watchword” is the title of Ernesto Che Guevara’s 1967 message to the Tricontinental (347). The last line of Laâbi’s poem replaces this allegorical Vietnam with Palestine, which becomes an equivalent symbol of world revolution.

10. Rothberg analyzes the intersection of Holocaust and postcolonial memories in Europe, arguing for a non-competitive approach to memory that allows for multiple and multidirectional vectors of memory production (6).

11. In 1964 Khaïr-Eddine and Nissaboury published a manifesto for a new francophone poetry, *Poésie toute*, followed by a short-lived poetry review, *Eaux vives*, which paved the way for *Souffles-Anfas*.

12. In *Souffles* “colonial science” designates orientalist epistemology and knowledge production (Laâbi, “Le gâchis” 5).

13. From 1972 to 1973 a new series of *Souffles* and *Anfas* was published clandestinely in Paris by militants hoping to mobilize international support for Laâbi, Serfaty, and hundreds of other political prisoners.

14. Notable exceptions are Heiler and Babana-Hampton, who problematize the neat distinction between the journal’s literary and political periods, arguing that these two dimensions are present throughout the journal.

15. See the illustration accompanying the rubric “Nation arabe” in *Souffles* 16–17 (3), the cover art of *Souffles* 15, and the Abdallah Hariri poster that served as a pendant to Laâbi’s “Nous sommes tous des réfugiés palestiniens” (79).

16. Massad includes the Moroccan historian and philosopher Abdallah Laroui’s *L’idéologie arabe contemporaine* (1967) and *La crise des intellectuels arabes* (1974) in this corpus, citing these works as examples of the “decadence” hypothesis (*Desiring Arabs* 18–19). Laroui was an important interlocutor for *Souffles-Anfas* (see his interview in *Anfas* 7–8 [“Maqabilah”]).

17. Khaïr-Eddine coined a similar expression, “guerrilla linguistique” (“linguistic guerrilla warfare”), in a poetic narrative titled *Moi l’aigre* (28).

18. Massad interprets Adonis’s text in this way, in a section fittingly entitled “To Emulate or Not to Emulate: That Is the Question,” arguing that the Syrian poet applies Eurocentric notions of secularism, liberty, and progress to Arabic literature (*Desiring Arabs* 95–98).

19. For an exhaustive description of these changes, see Tenkoul, esp. 197–200, 210–82.

20. *Anfas* is the plural of *naf*s, which also means “spirit” or “soul.”

21. The expression “from Palestine to the Western Sahara” closes the editorial on the Western Sahara in the special issue on African revolutions, adding a cross-Saharan decolonization of borders to the Maghreb-Mashreq axis (“Sahara” 48). This alliance of pan-African and pan-Arab ideals further demonstrates the profoundly anti-identitarian thrust of the journal’s cross-colonial solidarities.

22. There are a few exceptions to this silence. Laâbi’s prologue in the first issue discusses the problem of illiteracy (“Prologue” 3), and several articles in *Souffles* 3 address oral popular culture. See Bouanani on popular Moroccan poetry and Stouky on popular theater in Morocco.

23. As early as 1966, Laâbi noted the failures of arabicization policies in his article on national culture ("Réalités" 8).

24. Laâbi opts for the expression "poésie de combat" over "resistance poetry," reprising Fanon's notion of "combat literature" (*Damnés* 228) and inscribing this poetry in a cross-colonial rather than national genealogy. I am grateful to Anne-Marie McManus for pointing out Laâbi's choice of the expression "combat poetry."

25. Citing several poems by Laâbi, Kaye and Zoubir argue that Maghrebi writers cannot recover "the tribal language" but can only evoke "the search for that recovery" through "allegories of orality" (55).

26. See Feldman on the Black Panthers' engagements with the Palestinian cause. The Zapatista movement published a manifesto in support of Palestinians during the 2008–09 Gaza war (Marcos), and Franco-Maghrebi or Beur activists in France have rallied for Palestine from the 1970s to the present day (Boussoumah).

27. Sanbar uses the expression "figures of Palestinians" in a similar sense, referring not only to specific figures (the colonial subject, the refugee, the absentee) but also to trajectories, or figures, of exile and to poetic figures, or tropes.

28. In his essay "Envol des racines," Khatibi elaborates on the meaning of the root *gh-r-b* by evoking two Moroccan painters whose names capture the relation between East and West: Ahmed Cherkaoui (whose last name means "eastern" or "oriental") and Jilali Gharbaoui (whose last name means "western"). Characterizing Arab art as caught between East and West, Khatibi glosses his use of the name *Maghreb*: "Le mot *maghrib*: lieu où le soleil se couche, occident. Par extension, extrême éloignement. Toujours un horizon qui appelle le voyage, l'exil, la séparation avec le lieu natal" ("The word *maghrib*: the place where the sun sets, the west. By extension, extreme distancing. Always a horizon calling for travel, exile, separation from the native place"; *Maghreb pluriel* 214). A metaphor of this *écart* or distancing, the Maghreb represents an opening for Arab art, a chance to develop future forms in dialogue with Western and Eastern traditions.

29. Massad goes one step further, analyzing Black September in the framework of civil war and unraveling the construction of Jordanian and Palestinian identities as separate (*Colonial Effects* 240–45).

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# Come Be My Love: The Song of Songs, *Paradise Lost*, and the Tradition of the Invitation Poem

ERIK GRAY

THE FINAL SPEECH IN MILTON'S *PARADISE LOST* BELONGS TO EVE, who urges Adam to hasten away with her, out of the garden and into the world below:

[B]ut now lead on;  
In me is no delay; with thee to go,  
Is to stay here; without thee here to stay,  
Is to go hence unwilling; thou to me  
Art all things under heaven, all places thou,  
Who for my wilful crime art banished hence. (12.614–19)

Eve's "In me is no delay" carries at least two important echoes. It recalls the first description of Eve in book 4, where she is characterized by "sweet reluctant amorous delay" (4.311).<sup>1</sup> But the words also recall—indeed, translate exactly—"In me non est aliqua mora," the final line of what has been termed "the most famous and perhaps the oldest of the earlier mediæval love songs" (Waddell 323). This tenth-century lyric, "Iam, dulcis amica, venito" ("Come now, sweet friend"), is a prime example of one of the most prominent and enduring genres of European love poetry, the invitation—in which the speaker urges the beloved to abandon one place and come away to another, better place. The tradition of the invitation poem begins with the biblical Song of Songs and flourishes in the medieval and early modern period, including such well-known poems as Christopher Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love." Milton may not have known "Iam, dulcis" directly, but he was certainly familiar with the genre of love poetry that it represents, and he chose to cast the final speech of *Paradise Lost* as an invitation poem.<sup>2</sup>

Our understanding of Milton's poem is enriched if we recognize the traditional tropes and features of the invitation, since *Paradise*

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*Lost* contains no fewer than five speeches that clearly belong to the genre. This essay therefore begins by examining some of the history of the invitation poem and its chief characteristics, which have yet to be satisfactorily defined.<sup>3</sup> I start with the Song of Songs, which sets a number of important precedents for subsequent invitation poems, including the presence of a dialogic framework. Even more notable is the Song's use of displacement: although the invitation poem is a love poem, it devotes its attention not to the lovers themselves but to their destination—the *locus amoenus* ("pleasant place"), described in sensuous detail, to which the beloved is invited. Almost all the invitation's erotic energy is thus channeled into an account of the landscape; this sublimation of physical desire into locodescriptive fantasy turns what could be an abrupt demand (*Come to me, here*) into something more equitable: *Come with me, to a distant place we can share*. Yet the Song also introduces a troubling element, a concept of love as involving not only pleasure but self-sacrifice as well.

I then turn to two later examples of the genre, written six hundred years apart: "Iam, dulcis" and "The Passionate Shepherd." I focus on these two not because they are necessarily the best-known invitation poems, or even the ones that Milton would have known best, but because they bracket and represent the postbiblical tradition that Milton inherited. "Iam, dulcis" is the oldest surviving medieval example of the genre; it closely imitates the Song of Songs but also alters its emphases in ways that become increasingly pronounced in later invitation poems. "The Passionate Shepherd," meanwhile, is the first invitation poem in English, but it is also a culmination, since it draws both on the tradition stretching back to the Bible and on a separate, classical tradition of invitation poetry. Both works show tendencies that are typical of the genre's development. As the invitation poem evolves, the dialogue of the Song increasingly

gives way to monologue, and its mutuality to something more like seduction; similarly, the Song's imaginative concentration on a *locus amoenus* and its physical features yields to an emphasis on material goods. Hence, these later invitations, for all their beauty, are still more troubling than their model. In the Song, the trouble derives from the difficult, self-denying nature of love itself; in subsequent examples, it often derives more from the uncertain intentions of the speaker—the possibility of imposition or deceit.

In the invitation poem, therefore, Milton inherits a tradition that is both sacred and profane, capable of expressing extremes of both love and deception. In *Paradise Lost* he highlights the genre's double nature by giving the first two invitations to unfallen speakers—the first to the divine voice itself, the second to Adam—and the next two to Satan. In the final section of this essay, I argue that reading these passages in the context of the broader tradition reveals their full complexity. Doing so alerts us, for instance, to the element of threat or difficulty that exists even in the two "innocent" invitations. It also draws attention to an ominous omission: since the invitation poem is traditionally grounded in dialogue, it is particularly unsettling when Adam's stirring invitation to Eve at the beginning of book 5 receives no direct response.

Above all, an awareness of the invitation tradition transforms our understanding of Eve's final speech and hence of the whole concluding movement of the poem. In the passage quoted above, Eve draws attention to the fact that Adam's love for her has led to his exile ("Who for my wilful crime art banished hence"). But in the Song of Songs, and in many of the invitation poems that follow it, such self-banishment, though painful, frequently figures also as a positive force, a prelude to new growth. The hopefulness that Eve expresses in her speech can thus be seen to derive not only from the promise of Christian redemption that she and Adam

have been given but from her reconceiving of exile as invitation. Most important, the invitational tropes in Eve's speech allow us to recognize it as the long-delayed response to Adam's invitation in book 5. Despite her tone of submissiveness to, even dependence on, her husband, Eve in these lines is thus reasserting the mutuality of their relationship, continuing a conjugal dialogue that stretches across the apparent rupture of the Fall.

### The Song of Songs and the *Lech L'cha* Trope

The Song of Songs comprises a series of passionate erotic lyrics, spoken alternately by a woman and a man. It constitutes not so much a single, unified poem as a collection of lyrics in various styles: poems of yearning, poems of praise, brief narrative sketches. Critics disagree on how to divide up the poems, and sometimes even about whether a given verse is spoken by the man or the woman. But clearly the woman is given at least an equal role in the dialogue; indeed, her words begin and end the book. The Song thus differs from most of the love poetry that derives from it, in which the male voice tends to dominate; in the Song the two voices express reciprocal desire and emerge as equal participants.

The speakers' equality is reflected in the Song's three invitation poems, which form a small but crucial part of the dialogue: a recent analysis by Elie Assis considers the invitations as defining structural markers in the Song, the culminating points of each of its major movements (20–23). The second invitation, beginning at chapter 4, verse 8 ("Come with me from Lebanon"), is spoken by the man and the third, beginning at chapter 7, verse 11 ("Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the fields"), by the woman. The first invitation, the longest and by far the most influential of the three, is shared. The man speaks, but for once his words are presented as reported discourse, repeated or perhaps imagined by the woman as she sits indoors:

The voice of my beloved!

. . . . .

Look, there he stands behind our wall,  
gazing in at the windows, looking through  
the lattice.

My beloved speaks and says to me:

"Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away;  
for now the winter is past, the rain is over  
and gone.

The flowers appear on the earth; the time of  
singing has come,  
and the voice of the turtledove is heard in  
our land.

The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines  
are in blossom; they give forth fragrance.

Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the  
covert of the cliff,

let me see your face, let me hear your voice;  
for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely."

(*New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Song of Sg. 2.8–14)

The landscape to which the beloved is invited is in itself beautiful and fertile. But the true erotic power of these lines, as of every other invitation in the poem, depends on a simple but effective principle: namely, that the natural landscape being described is closely associated with the bodies of the lovers. This link has already been established a few verses earlier: "As a lily among brambles, so is my love among maidens. / As an apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among young men" (2.2–3). The identification grows stronger as the poem progresses, notably through the Song's repeated use of what in Arabic poetry is known as a *wasf*, a poem of praise in which each part of the beloved's body is described figuratively in terms of natural features (Black 9–64):

My beloved is all radiant and ruddy. . . .

. . . . .

His eyes are like doves beside springs of water,  
bathed in milk, fitly set.

His cheeks are like beds of spices, yielding  
fragrance.

His lips are lilies, distilling liquid myrrh.

(5.10–13)



Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with  
lilies.

Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of  
a gazelle.

. . . . .

You are stately as a palm tree, and your  
breasts are like its clusters. (7.2–7)

Topography and anatomy are interfused. Every invitation to “come away” to a distant place is also an invitation to erotic exploration—and, equally, to self-discovery, since the *locus amoenus* reflects both the lovers.

The conflation of place and person is perhaps clearest in the second invitation, which also foregrounds a complication or tension that characterizes all three of the Song’s invitation poems: “Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; come with me from Lebanon. / Depart from the peak of Amana, from the peak of Senir and Hermon, / from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards” (4.8). Again, this landscape echoes the description of the beloved’s body a few verses earlier, where the woman is likened to a mountain on which animals dwell: “Your hair is like a flock of goats, moving down the slopes of Gilead. / . . . / I will hasten to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense” (4.1–6). But here the difficulty arises. The woman is compared to a slope, a mountain, a hill. Is the request that she “depart from the peak[s]” of Lebanon, then, truly an invitation to a more amenable place, as it seems at first? Or is it, more troublingly, an order to quit a familiar landscape for one that is more alien?

The tension persists in the lines that follow. Having invited the woman away from the wilds of Lebanon—presumably to the cultivated area of Jerusalem, where the poem is set—the man describes her thus: “Your lips distill nectar, my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue; the scent of your garments is like the scent of Lebanon. / A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a fountain sealed / . . . / a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from

Lebanon” (4.11–15). Once more the woman is compared to the land into which she is being invited: she is a cultivated “garden,” and the “honey and milk” of her tongue recall “the familiar epithet of the land of Israel, the land flowing with milk and honey” (Landy, “Song” 314). Yet at the same time the woman is twice associated with the wild “Lebanon” she is being asked to abandon. The invitation is thus more complex than it seems, and this complexity becomes an important feature of subsequent poems in the tradition. The addressee is invited to a desirable and welcoming place, one that echoes her own features as well as those of her beloved. Yet the proposition is not simple, since she is being asked at the same time to take a difficult, even fearful, step, by leaving the familiar surroundings of home.

The same sense of conflict would seem to be absent from the first invitation in the Song, quoted above: the woman is invited out from behind a “wall” to enjoy a verdant landscape that resembles herself, a world where “the voice of the turtledove is heard,” just as she herself is compared to a “dove” whose “voice is sweet” (4.9, 12, 14). But even here there is an implied threat or difficulty. As Assis points out, in this archetypal invitation poem the Hebrew words *ulchi lach*, which have invariably been translated as “come away” (in the injunction repeated at the beginning and end: “Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away” [2.10, 13]), literally mean “go away” (83–90). For all its seductiveness, then, the poem culminates in what reads like an act of banishment. Yet the puzzling expression offers an important insight, since it points to a precedent that helps explain the ambiguity of threat and welcome, exile and homecoming, that characterizes all the invitations in the Song.

*Ulchi lach*—literally, “begone with you”—is the same command, only in feminine form, that God speaks to Abraham in Genesis 12.1: “Go [*lech l’cha*, or “begone with you”] from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will

show you.” These words mark a major turning point in Genesis, a transition from universal history to the story of a chosen people. God’s command constitutes both a serious test of faith, since Abraham is being asked to forsake everything that he has known, and a covenant, since God goes on to promise that a new homeland awaits, to be populated by the offspring that have eluded Abraham (“I will make of you a great nation” [12.2]).<sup>4</sup> The echo of these words in the Song is therefore apt, however discordant the phrasing may seem, since the invitation to a fresh and fertile new world (the garden of love, of sexuality) is at the same time an injunction to leave the familiar home of one’s parents.

Behind God’s command to Abraham, moreover, lies a yet earlier biblical formulation of the need to leave the parental home and seek abroad: “Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Gen. 2.24). Taken by itself, this verse seems to prescribe exogamy: love and marriage require a going forth to find someone new. In context, however, the verse is far more ambiguous. Earlier in Genesis 2, God recognizes that “it is not good that the man should be alone” and therefore forms all the animals out of the ground to show Adam; but none is deemed fit to be his partner (2.18). Finally God forms Eve directly out of Adam’s body, prompting Adam’s triumphant cry: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; / this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken” (2.23). Does a man “leave his father and mother and cling to his wife,” then, because she is other—not his parents but a new and undiscovered world? Or is it because she is closer to him—not alien earth but “flesh of his flesh”?

This ambiguity resounds through the later command to Abraham to leave his father’s house—is Abraham being asked to go forth, or to come back to his true home?—and into the echo of that command in the Song of Songs. The Song has often been recognized as

a version of the story of Eden (Landy, *Paradoxes* 183–265). The love relationship depicted in the Song displays, at every level, the ambiguity suggested by Genesis 2: that love is both a going out from oneself toward another and a finding of oneself reflected or embodied in the other. The invitations are focal points of this ambiguity, with their double sense of going forth and coming back, their summons to take a frightening leap into the unknown and to return to a landscape of comforting familiarity.

The same ambiguity—what I call the *lech l’cha* trope—is reflected in the Song’s frequent fusion, or confusion, of outside and inside, nature and culture. The third invitation, spoken by the woman, seems to gesture outward, to a fresh new world of natural growth:

Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the  
fields, and lodge in the villages;  
let us go out early to the vineyards, and see  
whether the vines have budded,  
whether the grape blossoms have opened and  
the pomegranates are in bloom.  
There I will give you my love.  
The mandrakes give forth fragrance, and  
over our doors are all choice fruits,  
new as well as old, which I have laid up for  
you, O my beloved. (7.11–13)

But this is followed immediately by a contradictory desire to retreat indoors, to the comforting familiarity of family love: “O that you were like a brother to me, who nursed at my mother’s breast! . . . / I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother, and into the chamber of the one who bore me” (8.1–2). On consideration, even the preceding invitation into the vineyard is not really a move out into the world, since the vineyard, like the enclosed garden of the second invitation (4.12), is a liminal space: outdoors, yet still private. Although the invitations are all directed outward into the natural world, they lead not into the wilderness but into something more tame and familiar: the garden and the vineyard represent nature, but nature cultivated and



prepared (“fruits . . . which I have laid up for you”). These intermediate spaces are apt correlates of a love object, who both participates in the great public world of the not oneself and also stands distinct from that world.

The Song of Songs thus sets a number of significant precedents for the invitation poem. It is, in the first place, radically dialogic. Second, it conflates place and person, so that an invitation to travel is simultaneously an invitation to love, and topographical descriptions of the proposed destination also function as suggestions of physical and emotional intimacy. Finally, the invitation always implies a dual movement. The journey is presented both as a return toward a safe, familiar place and as a banishment to the unfamiliar and unpredictable world outside the self.

### “Iam, Dulcis Amica, Venito”: Sweet Importunity

The tradition of the invitation poem flourished in the Middle Ages. It drew its inspiration from the Song of Songs but also introduced new features, which are already visible in the celebrated “Iam, dulcis amica, venito.” This lyric, which is preserved in three manuscripts dating from the tenth and eleventh centuries,<sup>5</sup> not only derives most of its imagery from the Song but also preserves its most definitive features. “Iam, dulcis,” like the Song, takes the form of a dialogue between a male and a female speaker, although scholars disagree about which stanzas belong to which voice (Dronke 243–52; Bradley). Once again, there is a clear erotic displacement: the speaker’s desire is channeled into a lavish description of the *locus amoenus*. And once again, together with the promise of pleasure comes a hint of anxiety, a recognition of the sacrifice that love entails, just as in the biblical model. “Iam, dulcis” differs from the Song chiefly in the disruption of the balance between its two speakers, a foregrounding of one’s more importunate desire.

The lyric begins in the voice of a man, who speaks through most of the poem:

Iam, dulcis amica, venito,  
quam sicut cor meum diligo!  
Intra in cubiculum meum  
ornamentis cunctis onustum!

Ibi sunt sedilia strata  
et domus velis ornata  
fioresque in domo sparguntur  
herbeque fraglantes miscentur. (1–8)

Come now, sweet friend,  
whom I love as my own heart!  
Enter into my chamber  
laden with all decorations!

There the couches are laid out  
and the house is hung with curtains,  
and in the house are scattered flowers  
and fragrant herbs mixed in.

These lines imitate the Song, sometimes verbatim;<sup>6</sup> yet the emphases have changed. This invitation is very much an *invitation*: the beloved is asked to enter (“Intra in”) an interior, curtained space. There she will find the usual flowers and herbs, but they have been artificially introduced to imitate wild nature (they are “scattered” through the house). The mixture of nature and culture, organic form and human artifice, echoes the gardens and vineyards of the Song, but with the emphasis clearly tilted toward artifice.

The description grows even more lavish in the stanzas that follow:

Est ibi mensa apposita  
universis cibis onusta;  
ibi clarum vinum habundat  
et quicquid te, cara, delectat.

Ibi sonant dulces symphonie  
inflanantur et altius tybie,  
ibi puer doctus et puella  
pangunt tibi carmina bella. (9–16)

There the table is set,  
loaded with every food,

there clear wine abounds  
and whatever delights you, beloved.

There sweet harmonies resound  
and flutes play above them,  
there a learned boy and girl  
compose lovely songs for you.

Here the erotic displacement, the substitution of place for person, is made all but explicit in the figure of the boy and girl. The rich decorations, which have been described provocatively in terms of all five bodily senses, now culminate in a matched pair, a stand-in for the lovers themselves. Since the boy and girl are composing songs, moreover, they suggest a possible *mise en abyme*, a tantalizingly endless artistic deferral of the proposed erotic union: a man and a woman sing, together, of going to a place where a boy and a girl sing, together, perhaps of another place . . .

At the same time that the poem thus imitates, and even refines, the substitutive eroticism of the invitations in the Song, however, it introduces a new element: an almost crass insistence on luxury or excess. Whereas the Song offered images of natural fertility and repletion, "Iam, dulcis" seems to go out of its way to suggest superabundance: it repeats how the room is loaded down (*onustum, onusta*) with all possible (*cunctis, universis*) foods and ornaments. Yet this material luxury is soon rejected in favor of the amorous pleasures for which, in any case, it stands:

Non me iuvat tantum convivium  
quantum predulce colloquium,  
nec rerum tantarum ubertas  
ut dilecta familiaritas. (21–24)

Such feasting does not delight me  
so much as sweet conversation,  
nor the richness of such objects  
so much as loving intimacy.

It is not clear who speaks these lines. It could be the woman, rejecting the excesses of the earlier descriptions, or the man, clarifying

the true aim and nature of his invitation. Yet the confusion is appropriate: not only does it hark back to the Song, where many lines are impossible to attribute to one speaker with any certainty, but the blending of voices in the reader's mind is fitting for a stanza that longs above all for dialogue (*colloquium*).

The crucial lines, which follow two stanzas later, are the only ones unquestionably spoken by the woman. The man repeats his invitation, and the woman replies with a speech that, as often happens in the Song, does not respond directly or logically. Her reply is engaged in the dialogue, yet it seems to hover above and apart from the rest of the poem:

Ego fui sola in silva  
et dilexi loca secreta;  
frequenter effugi tumultum  
et vitavi populum multum. (29–32)

I have been alone in the forest  
and have loved hidden places;  
I have often fled commotion  
and have avoided the multitude.

The lines are so striking partly because they are perfectly ambiguous. At a grammatical level, it is not clear whether the newly introduced perfect tense ("I *have loved* hidden places") indicates that the speaker now renounces such places (I used to love them), or that they remain habitual for her (I have always loved them and still do). More fundamentally, it is not clear whether a love of solitude and sequestration would naturally lead her to accept the man's invitation or to reject it. Is love social, in other words, or is it the opposite—a private retreat, where the only other people and things are mere reflections of the two lovers themselves? Once again, is the invitation to love a drawing outward or a drawing in?

This ambiguity is left unresolved as the man voices his final plea:

Karissima, noli tardare,  
studeamus nos nunc amare!



.....  
 Quid iuvat differre, electa,  
 que sunt tamen post facienda?  
 Fac cita quod eris factura:  
 in me non est aliqua mora! (33–34, 37–40)

Dearest, do not delay,  
 let us apply ourselves now to love!

.....  
 Why do you wish to put off, beloved,  
 what must be done in the end?  
 Do quickly what you will do:  
 in me is no delay!

Here a new note of urgency enters, audible not only in the rejection of deferral (“Quid iuvat differre?”), which heretofore has been the mode of the whole poem, but also in the sense of pleading, as if to overcome unwillingness—a sense almost wholly absent in the Song, where each party expresses a yearning for the other. The speaker in these stanzas proffers his invitation in terms of submitting to necessity rather than—or as well as—indulging in pleasure. This sense is reinforced by an ominous allusion to the Gospel of John, where Jesus at the Last Supper says to Judas, “Quod facis fac citius” (“Do quickly what you are going to do” [*Biblia*, John 13.27]), nearly the same words the speaker uses here (Dronke 250n). Yet even if the tone of urgency is new, the implication that love involves self-sacrifice follows directly in the tradition of the Song, with its constant undertone of *lech l’cha*. The connection is suggested by the final line, “in me non est aliqua mora,” which again echoes the language of the Song, recalling the phrase “Et macula non est in te” (“there is no flaw in you” [4.7]), phonetically (*aliqua/macula*) as well as syntactically. “Iam, dulcis” thus serves as a crucial link between the Song and the later tradition of the invitation poem. It maintains the sense of mutuality and the sublimated eroticism of its model, while foreshadowing later developments, in which a typically dominant male voice piles up physical enticements in an attempt to overcome or overwhelm the resistance of his addressee.

### Marlowe’s Seductive Shepherd

Christopher Marlowe’s “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love,” like “Iam, dulcis,” reflects the precedent of the Song of Songs, while carrying increasingly troubling overtones of monologue and materialism. The sense of trouble or danger is even stronger in the later poem, because Marlowe draws not only on the Song but also on the even more ambiguous classical tradition of the invitation poem. “The Passionate Shepherd” is the first, the best-known, and the most influential invitation poem in English. By the time it was published, posthumously, in two different verse collections (1599 and 1600), Marlowe’s poem was already so popular that it had been frequently imitated, by dramatists as well as poets.<sup>7</sup> R. S. Forsythe traces its influence all the way into the twentieth century, citing dozens of poems and plays and noting that, “initiated by Marlowe’s poem and its frequent imitations, a literary device, ‘the invitation to love,’ became established in English literature and has persisted in it down to our own time” (692).

Forsythe finds no real precedent for this device in English, and he traces Marlowe’s use of it not to the Bible but to classical pastoral poetry. In this he has been followed by later scholars, who generally cite three closely related poems as models: Theocritus’s idyll 11, in which the cyclops Polyphemus tries to woo the nymph Galatea; Vergil’s eclogue 2, which imitates Theocritus but replaces the cyclops and nymph with a pair of shepherds; and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, book 13, which also recounts the story of Polyphemus and Galatea.<sup>8</sup> Each poem contains a passage in which the speaker invites the beloved to live with him and describes the rewards that await if he or she accepts. Although they form an independent tradition, these pastoral poems bear strong resemblances to the invitations in the Song of Songs and its successors, most notably in their implicitly dialogic framework. Theocritus’s and Vergil’s poems each feature a

single speaker, but both appear in collections in which dialogue is more standard, and both immediately follow poems in which speakers engage in conversation. Instead of seeming normative, then, the single lyric voice feels incomplete: the speakers of idyll 11 and eclogue 2 offer their invitations aloud, and much of the pathos lies in the silence that follows. Ovid's poem recalls the dialogic structure of the Song more closely. Like the first invitation in the Song (the woman's recollection of the voice of her beloved [2.8–14]), Polyphemus's speech in Ovid is nested within that of Galatea, who recounts the invitation she once heard him speak.

Yet despite these affinities, there is a crucial difference between the invitations in the Song of Songs and those of the classical tradition. In the Song, the eroticized *locus amoenus* is offered as its own reward, a place for the lovers to seek out and enjoy together. In the classical tradition, by contrast, the richly described places and objects are, essentially, bribes. The pastoral speakers offer material luxuries not *as* but in exchange *for* erotic pleasures. Theocritus's cyclops explains that, though ugly, he is wealthy, and Corydon, the speaker in Vergil's eclogue 2, frankly refers to the flowers and spices he has described as *munera*—"gifts" or "rewards" (line 56). In Ovid the situation is, once again, slightly more complex. The cyclops describes a landscape that deliberately echoes his earlier descriptions of the beloved herself; he offers a world of apples and grapes, kids and milk, to a woman he has just described as being goodlier than apples, sweeter than grapes, friskier than a kid, milder than milk (13.789–97, 810–30). Polyphemus thus seems almost to have taken his cue from the Song: the language of his invitation appears to offer a comforting sense of return. Yet unlike the speakers in the Song, he insists throughout that all these objects belong to him: "omne meum est" ("it is all mine" [821]). And he concludes by referring to them in the same terms used by Vergil's Corydon: "Now, Galatea, come, and

do not spurn my gifts [*munera*]" (839). All the natural descriptions are thus merely a means to an end: one physical asset is being bartered for another. By contrast, in the Song and "Iam, dulcis" the delightful destination is itself the focus of attention, as erotic attraction is sublimated into topographical fantasy.

The achievement of Marlowe's poem is to combine the pastoral tradition of the gift-giving shepherd with the sublimated eroticism of the Song. The first move toward sublimation occurs at the end of the second line: "Come live with me, and be my love, / And we will all the pleasures prove. . . ." Taken by itself the couplet is straightforwardly erotic, an invitation to amorous experimentation. But the second line turns out to be enjambed, and the succeeding couplet unexpectedly reassigns the "pleasures" to the exploration of nature:

Come live with me, and be my love,  
And we will all the pleasures prove  
That valleys, groves, hills and fields,  
Woods, or steepy mountain yields. (1–4)

Erotic energy is projected outward. The second stanza continues this trend:

And we will sit upon the rocks,  
Seeing the shepherds feed their flocks  
By shallow rivers, to whose falls  
Melodious birds sing madrigals. (5–8)

Much as in "Iam, dulcis," where a boy and a girl sing of a place where a boy and a girl are singing, here the shepherd-singer invites his beloved to experience a place of shepherds and bird-song. The delicacy of the proposition lies in the displacement, the way the figure of the amorous speaker is diffused through the landscape.

The following stanzas systematically associate the woman too with the landscape, as various natural elements are transformed into adornments for her body:

And I will make thee beds of roses,  
And a thousand fragrant posies,



A cap of flowers, and a kirtle,  
Embroidered all with leaves of myrtle.

A gown made of the finest wool  
Which from our pretty lambs we pull,  
Fair lined slippers for the cold,  
With buckles of the purest gold. (9–16)

Nature, which had originally appeared wild (valleys, woods, steepy mountain), becomes cultivated for the beloved's enjoyment, just as in the Song of Songs. An even more subtle echo of the Song comes in the way Marlowe combines the invitation and the *wasf*, or part-by-part description of the beloved's body: each fragment of the landscape is converted into an article of clothing for a specific area of the woman's body. In contrast to the classical precedent, where these goods would be traded for erotic gratification, here the description itself provides that gratification. Douglas Bruster claims that "[w]ith each element building on the richness of the previous enticement, . . . the invitation of the Passionate Shepherd functions as a rhetorical version of the sexual act; the process of enumeration is intended to excite" (52). The self-conscious substitution of imaginative for physical pleasures is summed up in the word *posies*: "And I will make thee beds of roses, / And a thousand fragrant posies" (9–10). As Marlowe's editors point out, the word literally refers to bouquets of flowers but was frequently used to mean "poems"—and was, in fact, spelled "poesies" in the 1600 edition (Marlowe, *Collected Poems* 158n). The erotic energy of the invitation is thus displaced first onto the flowers (*Come to my bed . . . of roses*) and then onto the poetic description of them.

The movement from physical pleasures to abstract, metapoetic ones is visible again in the final stanzas:

A belt of straw and ivy buds,  
With coral clasps and amber studs,  
And if these pleasures may thee move,  
Come live with me, and be my love.

The shepherd swains shall dance and sing,  
For thy delight each May-morning.  
If these delights thy mind may move,  
Then live with me, and be my love. (17–24)

The penultimate stanza feels conclusive: having offered adornments to each part of the woman's body, culminating in her belt, the speaker repeats his original invitation verbatim (compare the repetition of "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away" [Song of Sg. 2.10, 13]). The poem has come full circle, like the belt; further elaboration seems unnecessary. Yet Marlowe provides an extra stanza that reaffirms the self-conscious nature of the proposition. First, the speaker again removes the focus from himself to an image of himself: "The shepherd swains shall dance and sing, / For thy delight each May-morning." The displacement suggests an endless deferral of actual erotic consummation, as reflected also in the promise of a changelessly recurring "May-morning." The speaker then rephrases his invitation in more specific terms: "If these delights thy *mind* may move." Unlike Polyphemus, Marlowe's speaker is asking above all for imaginative interaction.

Even Marlowe's highly refined and intellectualized invitation, however, is not entirely untroubled; but the trouble in this case arises not from the inherent difficulty of surrendering to love but from the phrasing of the proposal. Of the many responses and imitations to which "The Passionate Shepherd" gave rise in the Renaissance, a large proportion evince skepticism of the speaker's offer. Walter Raleigh's "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd," for instance, refuses the invitation because it is *too* abstract: such pleasures are tempting in theory, Raleigh's nymph points out, but have little meaning or value in the world as we know it. John Donne's "The Bait," meanwhile, recasts Marlowe's poem in terms of deception and entrapment. Bruster, who offers an excellent account of these and other responses, attributes them not only to readers'

consciousness of the classical precedent (in Ovid, Polyphemus's love quickly turns to violence) but also to their deep suspicion of "the potential danger of the monological" (54). Renaissance readers, that is, felt compelled to provide responses in part because the invitation assumes a different tone when the expression of desire is univocal.<sup>9</sup> Even more than at the end of "Iam, dulcis," the dominance of a single voice in "The Passionate Shepherd" becomes disturbing: the sublimation and displacement begin to suggest deviousness rather than delicacy. Certainly the history of responses to Marlowe's poem shows that readers, ever since the Renaissance, have found his invitation to be at once irresistible and troubling. The reassurance of its purely hypothetical, endlessly delayed pleasure is counterbalanced by a sense of dangerous seductiveness.

### *Paradise Lost*: Sacred and Profane Invitations

The story of *Paradise Lost*, as William Kerrigan and Gordon Braden observe, ultimately centers on love relations: "everything in this lofty poem gets placed in the history of Adam and Eve's 'wedded love'" (27). It is not surprising, therefore, that invitation poems figure prominently in the epic. Both the first and the last human conversations we encounter contain an invitation, and the poem as a whole features a total of five. Reading these passages in the light of the broader invitation tradition not only revises our understanding of the passages themselves—including the sense of promise in Eve's concluding speech—but contributes as well to the long-standing debate among Milton scholars concerning Eve's equality with Adam, both before and after the Fall.<sup>10</sup>

The first invitation in *Paradise Lost*, which is recalled by Eve in a speech to Adam in book 4, is pronounced by a divine voice (4.467–75). The second, and the one that most resembles the invitations in the Song of Songs, is spoken by Adam to the sleeping Eve

at the beginning of book 5 (5.17–25). But this is immediately followed by the third invitation's perversion of the genre: Eve awakens and recounts a troubling dream she has had (inspired, unbeknownst to her, by Satan), in which a tempting voice invites her forth to sin (5.36–47). This dream invitation prefigures the fourth and most insidious instance in the poem, when Satan in the serpent invites Eve to accompany him to the tree of knowledge (9.626–30). But the genre is redeemed at the very end of the work by the fifth invitation, Eve's final words. Eve's last speech, quoted at the beginning of this essay, might not seem to participate in the tradition, not least because her words reverse the familiar pattern: Eve invites Adam *out* of Paradise and into an unsheltered, imperfect world. Yet recognizing her speech as an invitation poem allows us to understand its full effect, since it reminds us of the element of return, as well as exile, that underlies every invitation to love.

Like "The Passionate Shepherd," therefore, *Paradise Lost* reveals the invitation poem as a potential vehicle both of true love and of danger. Milton, however, divides these two aspects: the invitations spoken by unfallen characters in the poem are purely innocent, whereas those spoken by Satan are wholly deceitful. Milton thus distinguishes between two ways in which the Song has been understood and used by later poets. Yet Satan's error lies not, as we might expect, in employing the language of the Song in a literal (erotic) sense. A long line of commentators, both Jewish and Christian, condemned any reading of the Song that treated it literally, as a poem of sexual love, rather than mystically or allegorically.<sup>11</sup> But Milton appears to condemn Satan's invitation for almost the opposite reason—because he uses the biblical tropes of love nontransparently, to mask another intent. Satan is thus cast as the forerunner of a tradition that appropriates the language of the Song for the purposes of seduction or clandestine encounter (Schultz 23–26).





*it, neither can the flouds drown it*" (251). The interchange between "fit conversing souls," which is so prominent in the Song, is similarly foregrounded in book 4. The dialogue between Adam and Eve is juxtaposed to the two long soliloquies that have just been pronounced by Satan (4.32–113, 358–92). Soliloquy, as critics have noted, is a debased form of discourse in the poem, used only by fallen characters.<sup>12</sup> Adam and Eve, by contrast, express their "conjugal fellowship" through dialogue.

When Adam offers his own invitation to Eve in book 5, therefore, we expect the discourse to be dialogic. But Satan has already muddled the perfect balance of conjugal conversation that we (and he) witnessed in book 4. After Adam and Eve go to sleep, Satan creeps into their bower and whispers in Eve's ear, troubling her dreams. As a result, when Adam wakes with the dawn in book 5, he finds to his surprise that Eve is still asleep—apparently something that has never happened before. But Adam as yet has no cause for concern, and his waking before Eve gives him occasion to pronounce his great, beautifully untroubled poem of invitation:

Awake

My fairest, my espoused, my latest found,  
Heaven's last best gift, my ever new delight,  
Awake, the morning shines, and the fresh  
field  
Calls us, we lose the prime, to mark how  
spring  
Our tended plants, how blows the citron  
grove,  
What drops the myrrh, and what the balmy  
reed,  
How nature paints her colours, how the bee  
Sits on the bloom, extracting liquid sweet.

(5.17–25)

Again, many of the tropes that characterize the Song and subsequent invitation poems are found here, but in their most innocent form. Adam refers, for instance, to a "gift"; yet unlike the speakers in Renaissance invitation poems

who, following the classical pastoral tradition, offer rewards to the beloved, Adam recognizes that Eve herself is a divine gift. Similarly, we find, as usual, indications of cultivation in the natural description ("tended," "paints," "extracting"). But the cultivation contains nothing artificial, since nature appears to be cultivated only by nature: nectar is distilled into honey by the bee; nature herself "paints her colours." The plants have been "tended," but the phrasing manages to efface the human agency that word implies. The garden to which Adam invites Eve is thus as pristine as can be imagined while still being distinguished from total wilderness. And yet even here, in this gentlest and least threatening of invitation poems, there is still the slightest sense of urgency, and even loss: Hurry, says Adam, "we lose the prime."

The real trouble, however, comes in the imperfect dialogue that follows. Eve, startled awake by Adam's words, speaks, but she does not respond to his invitation. Instead she describes the bad dream that Satan inspired. In place of invitation and response, therefore, we get an innocent invitation followed by a deceitful parody of one. In the dream, Eve recounts, an invisible voice calls her forth:

[M]ethought

Close at mine ear one called me forth to walk  
With gentle voice, I thought it thine; it said,  
Why sleepest thou Eve? Now is the pleasant  
time,  
The cool, the silent, save where silence yields  
To the night-warbling bird, that now awake  
Tunes sweetest his love-laboured song; now  
reigns  
Full orb'd the moon, and with more pleasing  
light  
Shadowy sets off the face of things; in vain,  
If none regard; heaven wakes with all his eyes,  
Whom to behold but thee, nature's desire,  
In whose sight all things joy, with ravishment  
Attracted by thy beauty still to gaze. (5.35–47)

As Howard Schultz notes, although Satan's speech begins in a familiar vein, it soon drifts



into something different: “if Milton meant an allusion to the Song of Solomon, he achieved it by contrast, for he carefully inverted the pictures, changing the dove for a nightingale and keeping only the sensuous delights” (24; see also Lewalski 106–07). Satan’s invitation reverses that of the disembodied voice of book 4, which called Eve away from her self-reflective gaze, and indeed reverses the whole *lech l’cha* trope. Eve is asked not to turn her attention away from herself toward an external object but the opposite; the speech begins by directing her gaze outward but concludes by focusing exclusively on her. In her dream Eve responds immediately to this false invitation, in terms reminiscent of the Song: “I rose as at thy call, but found thee not” (5.48; cf. *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Song of Sg. 5.5–6: “I arose to open to my beloved . . . but my beloved had turned and was gone”).

When Satan next addresses Eve, in book 9, he uses another trope of the invitation tradition—the equivalence of person and place—to terrible purpose. Approaching in the guise of the serpent, he flatters Eve, telling her that although all the beasts gaze at her admiringly, only he is able to appreciate her “celestial beauty” (9.540). When Eve asks how he has acquired human speech, he describes the Tree of Knowledge in the same terms: it is the “fairest” (9.577), just as Eve is “[f]airest” (9.538); and while the other beasts gaze on it with dumb longing, only the serpent is capable of appreciating its full powers. Having thus associated the tree with Eve and described it in sensuous detail, Satan invites her toward it:

Empress, the way is ready, and not long,  
Beyond a row of myrtles, on a flat,  
Fast by a fountain, one small thicket past  
Of blowing myrrh and balm; if thou accept  
My conduct, I can bring thee thither soon.  
(9.626–30)

The disastrous effectiveness of this invitation derives partly from Satan’s canny description,

and partly from the fact that he closely echoes the invitation that Eve heard Adam speak just as she was waking in book 5. Satan’s “blowing myrrh and balm” condenses Adam’s invitation to mark “how blows the citron grove, / What drops the myrrh, and what the balmy reed” (5.22–23). The difference is that whereas Adam received no reply to his invitation, Satan again receives an immediate affirmation: “Lead then, said Eve” (9.631).

Satan thus twists the traditional tropes of the invitation poem, but in familiar ways. The most disturbing elements of Satan’s invitations—their insinuating importunity, their tendency toward narcissism rather than mutuality and toward overvaluing something material (the tree)—are the same ones found in “Iam, dulcis” and “The Passionate Shepherd.” Just as Adam’s invitation in book 5 can be seen as the true original of the invitations in the Song, so Satan’s provide a prototype for certain aspects of the later (medieval and Renaissance) tradition of the invitation poem. But Milton is not willing to give the last word to Satan, and this is why it is so important to recognize Eve’s final speech in book 12 not only as a form of invitation but as the tragically belated response to Adam’s in book 5. The contexts for the two speeches are parallel, though reversed. In book 5 Adam expects Eve to be awake but finds her asleep, and he wakes her with his invitation. In book 12 he descends from the mountain expecting to find her asleep, but she is awake, and she pre-empts him by offering her own invitation out into the fallen world:

Descended, Adam to the bower where Eve  
Lay sleeping ran before, but found her waked;  
And thus with words not sad she him received.  
Whence thou returnst, and whither wentst,  
I know;  
For God is also in sleep, and dreams advise,  
Which he hath sent propitious, some great  
good  
Presaging, since with sorrow and heart’s  
distress

Wearied I fell asleep: but now lead on;  
 In me is no delay; with thee to go,  
 Is to stay here; without thee here to stay,  
 Is to go hence unwilling; thou to me  
 Art all things under heaven, all places thou,  
 Who for my wilful crime art banished hence.  
 (12.607–19)

At long last Eve responds to Adam's gentle exhortation to hurry: "lead on; / In me is no delay." More important, she uses two crucial invitational tropes. First, person as place: earlier in the poem the angel Michael had urged, "Where [Adam] abides, think there thy native soil" (11.292), and here Eve accepts the identification—Adam is to her "all places." Second, departure as return: Eve's striking declaration "with thee to go, / Is to stay here" encapsulates the *lech l'cha* paradox. With these words she acknowledges that the banishment she shares with Adam—to the land outside the garden, from the dust of which Adam was made—also represents a form of restoration.<sup>13</sup>

Eve's invitation, once we recognize it as such, reveals the same duality as every other invitation poem, only with the proportions reversed: it is essentially a poem of exile, but tinged with a sense of new beginning, as well as of welcome return. (Just after Eve speaks, she and Adam are implicitly compared to a tired laborer "[h]omeward returning" [12.632].) Consciousness of the invitation tradition thus allows us to understand why Milton characterizes her words as "not sad": love, even in Paradise, demands a form of exile or self-sacrifice, but it also promises a fit reward. The same consciousness alerts us, above all, to the way that Eve's speech restores the conjugal dialogue that Satan began to disturb with his false invitation in book 5. In spite of the new, more unequal gender roles that their transgression has brought about, Eve's invitation to Adam reaches across the Fall to reassert a sense of radical mutuality.

## NOTES

1. On Eve's delay, see Kerrigan and Braden 43.
2. Milton's early poems "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" both allude to the invitation tradition; their concluding couplets echo the close of Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd." On Milton's incorporation of lyric genres into *Paradise Lost*, see Lewalski, esp. 173–95.
3. Bruster; Cheney; Dronke; Forsythe; and Schultz have produced notable work relating individual poems to a broader invitation tradition. The tradition continues well beyond the Renaissance and includes such prominent examples as Charles Baudelaire's "L'invitation au voyage" (1855).
4. Thus, the medieval commentator Rashi understands *lech l'cha* not so much as "begone with you" as "go for yourself"—i.e., "for your benefit and for your good" (Silverstein 66).
5. I use the text of the Vienna manuscript, which is the most complete; all translations of "Iam, dulcis" are mine.
6. Dronke notes that "Iam, dulcis" closely imitates the language of the Vulgate translation, with occasional borrowing from the older (Hexaplaric) Latin version (237).
7. Many of these responses and imitations are reprinted in Marlowe, *Collected Poems* 159–68. I use the 1600 text of the poem, which has become standard.
8. See esp. Theocritus, idyll 11, lines 42–48; Virgil, eclogue 2, lines 45–55; and Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 13.810–39. The precedents are discussed by Forsythe 692–96; Bruster 50–51; Cheney 69–71.
9. In this sense Marlowe's invitation resembles the *carpe diem* tradition, which is also typically univocal and also associates the beloved with the landscape. The difference between the two genres lies in the nature of the threat: the *carpe diem* poem warns of the danger of growing old, while the invitation poem acknowledges the difficulties of growing up.
10. Wittreich offers a classic account of this debate (1–15, 83–109); see also Turner 271–87. Among more recent criticism concerning ontological and rhetorical distinctions between Adam and Eve on either side of the Fall, see Polydorou; Revard; Labreche; and esp. Rogers.
11. Thus, Rabbi Akiva (early second century CE) wrote, "Whoever trills his voice singing the Song of Songs in a banquet hall, regarding it as a common song, has no part in the world to come" (Bergant viii). Origen, the most important early Christian commentator, is equally insistent on an allegorical interpretation (Astell 1–24). In *Paradise Lost*, however, Milton clearly understands the Song literally, as a poem of erotic love, as well as allegorically (McColley 92–98; Flinker 145–59).
12. See Fowler's note to *Paradise Lost* 4.32–41 (Milton, *PL* 217).
13. Eve's speech, besides recalling Adam's book 5 invitation, also echoes his speech in book 9, when he grants her request to separate from him: "Go; for thy stay, not



free, absents thee more" (9.372). Eve presents the same paradox—to go is to stay—but her concluding invitation joins back together what Adam's (unwilling) dismissal had put asunder. On the intricate rhetoric of Eve's speech, which is both an invitation poem and a blank verse sonnet, see Wittreich 103–05.

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What Does Fiction Have to Do with It?

GLENDA R. CARPIO

Kenneth W. Warren’s *What Was African American Literature?* offers a much needed challenge to ahistorical, purportedly “progressive racial scholarship and racial literature” that uses “the history of racial trauma” (i.e., the Middle Passage and slavery) to convince mainly “white and black conservatives” that “racism still matters and still explains ongoing inequalities” (86). As Hua Hsu notes, the book “expands [Warren’s] long-standing skepticism toward academic work’s politically galvanizing effects” (132).<sup>1</sup>

This is for me the most incisive aspect of Warren’s book. I hope it will challenge scholars to rethink the conventional, empty goal of pointing to the obvious as if it were a revelation—mainly, that racism persists and that we should look to the history of racial trauma to discover why. All too often the subjects of this kind of scholarship (and by implication the scholars themselves) stand, heroically, as radicals whose “commitments to social justice . . . can serve as repositories or inspirational examples of how we might in the present confront the emergency represented by the ongoing inequalities of our own time” (86). At its best this is a sentimental relation to the past; at its worst it is self-serving and obfuscating. By contrast, Warren boldly argues that to “understand both the past and the present, we have to put the past behind us” (84). His boldness is refreshing, though it poses some problems. As Hsu notes, “Warren’s analysis underestimates the broader, more nebulous blast radius of slavery—the effects that are not as legible or confirmed by statute, the ills that are perpetuated through ideology rather than code” (135) and that may just make putting the “past behind us” more challenging than Warren might warrant.

Warren’s intense focus on history and politics also offers a limited vision of African American literature as art. In his efforts to properly historicize African American literature Warren has precious little to say about literary form. He makes a persuasive ar-



gument for how the function of African American literature was tied to the racial politics of Jim Crow (although, as Eric Sundquist has noted, echoing others, Warren doesn't "specify when the Jim Crow era ended—surely not in 1954, or even 1964, but when?" [551]). And what about the formal richness and variety of African American literature? Has form also been tethered to politics? Warren would argue that, yes, black literary art was indeed either "indexically" (as measure of achievement in art) or "instrumentally" (as social and moral instrument) tied to Jim Crow whether writers consciously understood their work as such or not. Perhaps, but the inescapability of this scenario strikes me as totalizing. Early in his book, Warren warns that he is not interested in "attending to the historical processes, institutional effects and social pressures as these broader forces are reflected in and refracted through authorial style," that his focus is on how African American literature "constitutes a representational and rhetorical strategy within the domain of a literary practice [that is] *responsive to conditions* that, by and large, no longer obtain" (8–9; my emphasis). Warren is too subtle a thinker to argue that art is responsive solely to its contexts, yet he often comes close to doing so while offering discussions of novels as varied and aesthetically rich as George Schuyler's *Black No More* (1931), Edward P. Jones's *The Known World* (2003), and Michael Thomas's *Man Gone Down* (2007) only by way of content analysis.

I wonder too what he makes of a writer as slippery as Zora Neale Hurston, whose works do not fit easily into the indexical or instrumental categories that Warren uses. Hurston's complicated political views might suggest otherwise. In 1954 she opposed the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* because she did not see it as a productive way of combating Jim Crow. Yet her joyous sense of humor and willingness to experiment with form (at the risk of produc-

ing uneven results) reveal a writer who did not always fix on Jim Crow, though this exposed her to the scorn of writers like Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison. She focused on American black life, but she also lived abroad (in the Bahamas, Haiti, Jamaica, Honduras), exploring black culture more broadly. Hurston rejected what she called the "sobbing school of Negrohood," famously declaring that she did not feel "tragically colored" (827). While such statements were often forms of posturing, Hurston was on to something missing in Warren's account of African American literature: a sense of freedom and joy. In the context of Warren's arguments it seems impossible to think that African American writers could and did write for pleasure and that African American readers could and did read for beauty, because everything seems to have been funneled through the all-consuming power of Jim Crow.

Warren's historicizing of African American literature and his contention that contemporary black American fiction is the work of memory and identity are stimulating. His arguments advance the soul-searching that African American studies has undergone in the last few decades. But reading Warren's book I have to remind myself that I am reading about literature and not strictly about political science or history, with fiction in the passive role of cultural evidence. What would it mean to take the power of fiction in shaping the world as seriously as Warren takes history and politics?

## NOTE

1. See, e.g., Warren, "End(s)."

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## What Is Jim Crow?

GENE ANDREW JARRETT

The titles of Kenneth W. Warren's essay "Does African-American Literature Exist?" and book *What Was African American Literature?* instantly provoked me.<sup>1</sup> Admittedly skeptical of these questions, I could not help turning to my mental Rolodex of published authors and texts attesting to African American literature's historicity or currency. As I read the essay and the book, I gradually realized that they raised more questions than answers—which, I suppose, could have been the point all along. Warren's work pulled the rug out from under long-standing fields of academic inquiry and devoted readers outside the academy. In doing so, it elicited an initial public reaction in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that was marvelous for its diversity and intensity. Subsequently, in the spate of responses online and in print, at conferences and in classrooms, his work has breathed fresh air into scholarship on African American literary history.

In the year that has passed since I first read Warren's writings, my disagreement with his main argument remains, yet the thrust of my critique has changed. Previously I accepted, as many did, the historiographical premise of Jim Crow in *What Was African American Literature?* For Warren, Jim Crow means the "system of Jim Crow segregation" that once defined a "social world": "This so-

cial order, created by local and statewide laws, statutes, and policies, received constitutional sanction in 1896 with the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*," and "it was finally dismantled, at least judicially and legally, in the 1950s and 1960s," specifically with the 1954 ruling by this court in *Brown v. Board of Education*, overturning *Plessy* (1–2). (A quick glance at the *MLA International Bibliography* shows that Warren's characterization of Jim Crow largely resembles what one finds in the latest literary scholarship.) Based on this standard definition in literary studies, I maintained that the genuine intellectualism of African American writers, even the notorious elitism of some of them, did not rob their literature of effectiveness in the formal (or state-sanctioned, electoral, and legal) realms of political action ("African American Literature"). A flexible cultural notion of political action shows not only that African American literature has long existed but also that it is a legitimate thing of the present and the foreseeable future, as long as its writers see themselves and act as agents of social change.

Now, I believe that the historiography of Jim Crow that Warren uses to launch *What Was African American Literature?* should have been as controversial as his resultant periodization of African American literary



history. Warren declares that African American literature “gained its coherence as an undertaking” during the fifty-eight years when blacks and whites could occupy only so-called separate-but-equal public spaces and facilities (1). And “with the legal demise of Jim Crow,” he goes on to say, “the coherence of African American literature has been correspondingly, if sometimes imperceptibly, eroded as well” (2). Yet we should resist the constriction of Jim Crow to the first half of the twentieth century. Such a narrow periodization overstates the role that constitutional or juridical events have played in race relations, while restricting the political awareness and activities of African American writers to discourses of de jure racial segregation.

Encapsulating a spectrum of racial conflict and domination that stretches from well before 1896 to after 1954, Jim Crow demands paradigms of literary study attuned to an expansive historiography. Scholarly approaches to segregation’s history, according to John David Smith, should focus on “differentiating between segregation by custom, habit, or practice (de facto segregation) and segregation by specific law (de jure segregation). Historians have frequently erred by focusing too narrowly—on de jure segregation only—thereby missing long-standing patterns of informal racial separation that have stained the fabric of interracial contact throughout American history” (7). Though *Jim Crow* was a term first used in 1841 to classify racially segregated railroad facilities in Massachusetts, it also “existed informally throughout much of the country’s antebellum history” (10).

Literary studies of Jim Crow should strive for the flexible definition and periodization found in the scholarly work of Saidiya Hartman and Ivy G. Wilson on slavery and antebellum American literary and cultural production. Reconfiguring the antebellum political sphere, Hartman has shown that, while President Abraham Lincoln’s

executive order of 1 January 1863 may have formally emancipated slaves, a longer and more nuanced view of history would see that “emancipation appears less the grand event of liberation than a point of transition between modes of servitude and racial subjection” (6). Writing literature qua literature, furthermore, did not necessarily depreciate or misguide African Americans’ political ability to focus on and redress the vestiges of servitude and subjection—and, not unrelated, segregation—regardless of official emancipation. “If formal politics signal certain institutional practices such as electoral processes and policy making,” Wilson claims, regarding the aesthetics of politics in antebellum America, “then a turn to culture as a particular arena where African Americans had varying levels of agency is all the more necessary in the years before they were ostensibly granted access to these structures with the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment” (7). Such informed historiographies of slavery and freedom help put in perspective Warren’s claim, ironically both an assertion and a potential concession “in the face of textual evidence,” that African American literature of the antebellum period “was changed significantly by the necessity of confronting the constraints of the segregation era” (7). Smith, Hartman, and Wilson have suggested that the period between 1896 and 1954 likely was not so unique in this regard.

By the same token, Jim Crow or racial segregation emerges after this period by other names to signify circumstances of social constraint. “Since the nation’s founding,” as Michelle Alexander puts it in her study of the social control of mass incarceration, “African Americans have repeatedly been controlled through institutions such as slavery and Jim Crow, which appear to die, but are then reborn in new form, tailored to the needs and constraints of the time” (21). Here again we have the information to critique Warren’s secondary claim that “African American

literature itself constitutes a representational and rhetorical strategy within the domain of a literary practice responsive to conditions that, by and large, no longer obtain" (9). Since Alexander has shown that such conditions still obtain, one has to wonder whether during the first half of the twentieth century African Americans' enlistments of literature in the service of social change—or what Warren partly means by the literature's "coherence"—were so exceptional as to justify Warren's argument about the literature's subsequent demise. My bet is that these enlistments were not. Rather, African American writers across a *longue durée* persisted, through success and failure, in making an artistic and political impact on social attitudes and practices precisely because they recognized that Jim Crow, narrowly or broadly defined, was not the only kind of racism that afflicted the world.

## When African American Literature Exists

R. BAXTER MILLER

In making an important distinction in 1972 between Langston Hughes and Ralph Ellison, both of whom he appreciated, George E. Kent, of the University of Chicago, recognizes the artistic superiority of Ellison. Then Kent warns that the imaginative transformation of folk sources alone hardly suffices, for "the basic *attitudes* [spirit] and *forms of response to existence* are abandoned by us [African American critics] at our peril" (162; my italics; see also Miller, "Mirrored Reflection" 163). Who would have thought then that a later theorist at Chicago would envision the

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1. Warren drew "Does African-American Literature Exist?" from *What Was African American Literature?*, so I quote only from the book.

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demise of African American literature within the next forty years? In serious reflection, I shall define African American literature as folk, or even sometimes highbrow, responses to a community's existence and as original and innovative idioms, forms, and aesthetics of particular yet "universal" import from 1773 (when Phillis Wheatley's *Poems* was published) to the present.

Yes, it may be true that, as Kenneth Warren maintains in *What Was African American Literature?*, African American literary tradition expressed a theme of racial protest



during the Jim Crow years of 1896–1964.<sup>1</sup> And, yes, the March on Washington in 1963 resulted in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. But, as Charles T. Davis shows, African American literature preceded Warren's temporal brackets by at least 123 years (81).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, according to my interpretive and ideological reading of American history, no termination date for the tradition exists.

In fact, Warren's concept of African American literature is reductive anyway. I propose that African American literature defines itself as tropes written especially in the face of the impending reality and later occurrence of the Civil War and, a century later, the civil rights movement. Even more important, the genre points subtly to the decentralized spaces of epiphany, meaning, and interpretation between Warren's historical markers and beyond them, including the Harlem Renaissance, in the twenties, and the New Chicago Renaissance, from the thirties to the early seventies (Miller, *On the Ruins*). If the postracial theorist proposes to erase such memory, he reminds us in the process that the memory is there to be erased. In saying that African American literature *was*, the disingenuous theorist confirms that it *is*. For African American literature not only represents such historical moments but also encapsulates the memory of intense experiences.

Warren's critical world must be discredited because it seeks to reestablish a Eurocentric primacy based on the American literary canon of the late nineteenth century, especially Henry James ("Still Reading" and "Race"); because it attempts subconsciously to resituate Ellison as the foremost "Negro" novelist in the traditional American canon ("Ralph Ellison"); and, finally, because his postracial method tries to obscure that African American literature, despite his claims, endures. In closing, I offer proof of a folk continuum in *Dreams from My Father* (1995), by Barack Obama, and "I Was Here but I Disappeared" (1990), by Wesley Brown. The folk

are the invisible thinkers in Warren's elite critical world.

Warren's work has expressed an obvious preference for a Eurocentric viewpoint on African American texts—indeed, has anxiously craved assimilation of them into the traditional American ideologies of liberal democracy and comparative culture—for the last nineteen years. In his consideration of racial guilt in *Black and White Strangers* (1993), about the traditional novel of American realism, Warren invents a clever way to absolve the traditional novel from the expression of any complicity with the national mores of racial discrimination. Here especially he also establishes Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) as a better work about the "Negro" plight than the "incoherent" books of Richard Wright. Yet he offers no evidence of having ever read *The Man Who Lived Underground* (1945) or "Big Black Good Man" (1957), two of Wright's refined aesthetic structures. As some may know, there has been a decided tendency since 1930 for each decade's readers to declare themselves on Wright's proletarian side or Ellison's artsy side. While the rebellious audiences of the thirties and sixties favored the former, readers of the fifties and eighties privileged the latter (Miller, "Deeper Literacy"). When Warren in his later career interviews the novelist Leon Forrest, a Northwestern University professor and exuberant disciple of Ellison, Warren confirms a stylistic continuum that extends from the Victorian prose of W. E. B. Du Bois to the elite poetry of Robert Hayden. Nevertheless, Warren's own unabated praise for the traditional novelist in "Ralph Ellison and the Problem of Cultural Authority" (2004) reveals a double standard. Insofar as he sees Ellison, along with the novelist's namesake, Ralph Waldo Emerson, as intellectual role models, Warren treats African American writers as literary devices, objects or tools representing democratic principles, rather than as the subjects of their own freedom. Though Warren is right in

suggesting that Americans of all races share a culture, he circumvents any celebration of cultural distinctiveness.

His elite aesthetic cannot account for the writing by the former slave Frederick Douglass, who from 1845 to 1883 helped distinguish a literary tradition that according to Warren simply didn't exist then. A generation later than 1845, the year his first autobiography, *Narrative of Frederick Douglass*, was published, Douglass explains in *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* the consequences of the Supreme Court's overturning of the 1875 Civil Rights Act. Perceiving the symbolic recurrences in American history, Douglass represents a heroic emblem that Hughes inscribes as a poetic figure. It is not coincidental that Warren, the historicist-literalist, privileges Hayden's high-modernist representation over Hughes's folk praise song (Warren, Afterword 436).

African American literature precedes the arbitrary date of 1896 and extends past the equally capricious endpoint of 1964. In a story about growing up in Hawaii and later Indonesia, the autobiographer Barack Obama deliberates in *Dreams from My Father* about the way that the case resolutions in law books can prove unsatisfying (391–96). He attended Occidental College and Columbia University back in the American homeland during the late seventies and early eighties, and for nearly every altruistic case such as *Brown v. Board of Education* he now discovers countless others that reveal the more prevailing compulsions of expedience and greed. Residing in Chicago's South Side, Obama has no clue that a poet who once inspired him in Hawaii years ago was Frank Marshall Davis, who had been a proletarian figure in the New Chicago Renaissance. In fact, it was the departure of Davis to Hawaii that helped end the movement (83–133).

Similarly, a well-constructed, entirely fictional story exposes the utopian flaw of a post-racial America at the turn to the twenty-first century. Indeed, the imaginary recounting

proves that the rumored demise of African American literature is greatly exaggerated. In a literal and figurative flight from the commitments imposed by a girlfriend, Faye, in New York, Tyrone, the protagonist in "I Was Here but I Disappeared," flees to San Francisco to visit his black friend Rudi and Rudi's white girlfriend, Alex. Both are new age minimalists—in other words, idealistic theorists who repress the historical memory that would complicate their existences. On the beach sand, a local artist has drawn a featureless Jesus, based on a colorless sketch of Rudi done when he first arrived in California. By the end of the last, splendid turn, the protagonist, now returned to New York, saves his mirrored image from modernist and postmodernist fragmentation. Just before the image vanishes at a dance, he reasserts his redemptive discomfort: "I was not about to exempt myself from the terrors of being alive" (101). Therefore, the cultured responses to existence, those that are forgotten only at our peril, are rooted in spiritual testimony (Miller, *Artistry*). Even if the demise of Jim Crow segregation were true (a scholarly imaginary), the lasting impact on the nation's aesthetics would remain. While Marxist dynamics are in play, ideas are far less confined by time. African American literature is and will be.

## NOTES

1. It would provoke an interesting exchange to deliberate on whether such an idealistic goal *has* ever been achieved.

2. Davis, a professor of English, founded the Department of African American Studies at Yale University.

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## What Was African American Literature?

### SONNET RETMAN

Kenneth Warren’s tightly woven treatise *What Was African American Literature?* asks his readers to reflect on the epistemological assumptions that define African American literature as a practice and a field of inquiry. In original close readings of novels such as George Schuyler’s *Black No More* (1931) and Michael Thomas’s *Man Gone Down* (2007), alongside analyses of literary criticism from W. E. B. Du Bois’s “Criteria of Negro Art” (1926) to Trey Ellis’s “The New Black Aesthetic” (1989), Warren suggests that the conception of African American literature as a changing form of group expression across centuries is ahistorical and incorrect. Warren argues instead that Jim Crow made it possible for African American literature to emerge as a national ethnic literature. More

provocatively, he argues that with the end of Jim Crow and its insistence on racial difference between whites and blacks and on racial cohesion among blacks, a distinct and collective African American literature is no longer viable. Indeed, its nostalgic continuation primarily benefits black elites under the guise of racial progress for all African Americans, sustaining ever-more-inequitable class relations. For this reason he advocates leaving the paradigm of African American literature behind. At stake here are nothing less than the terms of emergence and engagement through which we imagine African American literature.

Situating African American literature as a bounded historical phenomenon, a “symptom” rather than a “cure,” Warren raises important questions about literature by black

writers that both preceded and followed the era of Jim Crow (148). Warren is careful to suggest that the end of African American literature depends not on the end of racism but on the end of Jim Crow. Yet we might narrate its shifting formation, the terms of its emergence and engagement, using other paradigms, archives, and methodologies. If Warren asks his readers to take a close look at the imbrication of race and class in a contemporary black literary project, we might take a closer look at the imbrication of race and class in the literature of segregation that underpins his argument.

Many of the texts Warren treats in his book, works by Du Bois, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Nella Larsen, Schuyler, Wallace Thurman, and others contemplate not merely the end of black difference that would occur if Jim Crow were overcome but also black peoples' gendered encounters with racial capitalism, as its central modes of production, distribution, and exchange come into crisis and transform. Would black people want to assimilate into and succeed in current capitalist structures, or does the fight against Jim Crow require a larger restructuring of the nation's economic system, given the ways race is foundational to capitalism in the United States (Robinson 2)? To ask the question more broadly, following Schuyler's *Black No More*, could capitalism and its class structure ever be shorn of race or gender? Certainly, the radical turn of the thirties animates this question, as writers such as Du Bois (in *Black Reconstruction*) and Hughes (in *The Ways of White Folks*) shuttle back and forth between the past, present, and future to consider the historical dimensions of this question.

Taking a cue from this Jim Crow archive, what if racial capitalism and heteropatriarchy are the shifting conditions that make African American literature possible? In this formation, African American literature is defined by black writers' interrogation and mediation of racial capitalism, which include the slave narratives' denunciation of chattel slavery and the

genre's engagement with gendered notions of American individualism and proper kinship formation; the consolidation of African American writing as a body of literature critical of Jim Crow, in part made possible by reading publics formed in a segregated literary marketplace; and contemporary questions in African American literature about the past and present contours of American blackness in relation to neoliberalism, multiculturalism, and the carceral state, a form of engagement enabled by a recent boom in the marketplace for black writing. Indeed, a spate of new books by scholars such as Jodi Melamed, Grace Kyungwon Hong, and Chandan Reddy situates such discourses of multiculturalism and the attendant institutionalization of ethnic national literatures in the academy within the larger operation of neoliberalism's putatively antiracist maneuvers, part of its management of difference. From this vantage, we encounter the vexing conditions of possibility for the emergence of African American literature as a canon. These accounts question the political efficacy of such forms of institutionalization. Yet they also point to the possibility of more-radical traditions and conceptions of African American literature that query past and present conditions of racial capitalism and heteropatriarchy. In this sense African American literature is, not was, though its focus and terms of articulation have changed considerably.

Given that much of Warren's argument depends on the codification of race at the level of the nation-state, it is curious that he makes no mention of the impact of mass incarceration on working-class black and Latino communities, its creation of new yet familiar social relations and disposable populations, what Michelle Alexander refers to as "the new Jim Crow" and Dylan Rodríguez as "racial genocide" (809–10). Present racial conditions and identities, organized in part by the state from the Moynihan report of 1965 forward, have given rise to a vigorous debate about racial formation, biopolitics, labor,



class, and state governmentality, explored and acted on in a variety of narratives that constitute a capacious, contemporary African American literature, including works such as Toni Cade Bambara's *Gorilla, My Love*, Paul Beatty's *White Boy Shuffle*, Octavia Butler's *Parable* series, Suzan-Lori Parks's *The Red Letter Plays*, Junot Diaz's *Drown*, and more.

Largely absent from Warren's book are black women writers and queer writers of color. Warren neglects the significance of black feminist literary criticism and queer-of-color critique in envisioning new paradigms for conceiving and interrogating an African American literature. This has everything to do with his argument's static notion of African American literature as a historical phenomenon formed in the crucible of Jim Crow representational politics that gives rise to a masculine bourgeois leadership model. Warren criticizes this model for its narrow class politics and would most likely agree that its masculinist and heteronormative imperatives are equally myopic. But what if the problem lies instead with Warren's model, his insistence on a kind of group coherence that reproduces the elite brokerage model even as he criticizes it and allows that there is little consensus in the Jim Crow era on how literature ought to respond to segregation? Warren contends that in the present moment "the idea that sustains the possibility of an African American litera-

ture is a belief that the welfare of the race as a whole depends upon the success of black writers and those who are depicted in their texts," but his contention relies entirely on the archive of critics and writers he selects (139).

What if the very debate about the grounds on which African American literature is constituted—the debate Warren engages in—is part of the engine that drives the writing and its scholarship, as it has for a long time? In some sense, then, the temporally dynamic title of Warren's book, *What Was African American Literature?*, is the answer. The debate around Warren's book sounds to me not so much like the death knell of a perishing discipline as like the clashes of a contested field in transition.

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## This Is *Not* an Apologia for African American Literature

MARLON B. ROSS

It seems to me that Kenneth W. Warren's *What Was African American Literature?* intends to provoke exactly the kind of defensive response

from scholars in the field that I am tempted to compose here but shall not. After all, any book declaring the end of African American

literature, much more so one written by a noted scholar of African American literature, is asking for a fight. Instead of providing a defense of the ongoing vitality of African American literature, which in fact needs defending neither more nor less than any other literature (be it “British,” “American,” “commonwealth,” “Irish,” “postcolonial,” “transatlantic,” “Southern United States,” “African,” or “Persian”), I think it behooves us to ask, *Why promote this kind of book now?* Many Americans are experiencing a funny (as in ironic) desire to be done with this black thing once and for all, yet such a desire only evinces how foundational this black thing is to the American imaginary and the United States body politic.

A book such as Warren’s published when the liberal arts are under assault for failing to prepare students for a postindustrial, high-tech global economy could produce only intensified anxiety over what is worth teaching and learning—more precisely, what is expendable—in a secondary or college education, a not-unfounded anxiety given the recent Arizona law prohibiting the teaching of “ethnic studies” courses (ARS 15-112). Despite its spectacular presence in the humanities curriculum reconstituted after universities began desegregating in the 1960s and as black studies emerged, African American literature is hardly the most pressing controversy on the lips and minds of most parents, students, teachers, politicians, and policy makers wringing their hands over the crises in higher education. A book like Warren’s, though, feeds a subterranean fear that a field just now gaining its academic strength within and beyond English departments will be scrutinized as yet another instance of the professoriat’s penchant for faddish inessentials. If, as Warren suggests, African American literature “was” merely a select set of texts published by individual Negroes between the 1880s and the 1950s aimed at countering the Jim Crow regime by displaying the belletristic humanity of the race—the right of African Americans not only to vote

but also to compose belles lettres—then it could at best be characterized as a phase or fad whose time elapsed with the putative fall of Jim Crow segregation.<sup>1</sup> Should we then haul this thing called African American literature into the corners of civil rights heritage museums and put it on display alongside tar-baby childrens’ books, Aunt Jemima cookie jars, and “Colored Only” restroom signs?

Warren says his argument hinges on the idea not of a “postracial” but of a “post-Jim Crow” timeline (5), but wrangling over the question of whether the United States is post-racial or postsegregation—when in fact it is most likely neither—only diverts us from Warren’s deeper assumption that a literature can be equated with, or reduced to, a single political factor, no matter how centrally oppressive that factor may be. On the one hand Warren distinguishes African American literature as “a ‘historical’ entity rather than as the ongoing expression of a distinct people” (8), as if any literature is anything but “historical” and as if African Americans are any more or less “distinct” than any other historically defined cultural group—such as the British or, indeed, the American people—whose claims to authentic identity are riven with political strife (not to mention bloody civil wars) despite militarily enforced national borders. On the other hand Warren writes about African American authors as though they are merely a collection of less-than-rugged individuals, each offering a competing version of what African American literature should be that is based only on the political project of using high-brow literature to defeat the Jim Crow regime.<sup>2</sup> In this way Warren’s thinking seems historicist, the charge he lobs against current fiction mislabeled African American (97–107), since he is trapped by the historical moment that is his object of study, so much so that he adopts a notion of the literary that was current around 1900 to 1940 and accordingly rehearses the binary logic evident in many African American literary manifestos of this era. In fact,



Warren's argument retreads Richard Wright's ambivalent logic in "The Blueprint for Negro Writing," in which Wright on the one hand demands that Negro writers ground literature in the Negro folk consciousness based in the "most complete and indigenous expression" of Negro folklore (literature deriving from a "distinct people") while on the other hand declaring that the ultimate end of Negro literature is to overcome a "specious and blatant nationalism" by assimilating into American national literature. Unlike Wright, however, Warren cannot imagine an American literary tradition (United States national literature as an unstated but unchanging, categorical norm against which the abnormal condition of African American literature can be arbitrated) transformed by its confluence with African American writing, which was Wright's objective. Nor can either imagine a future for African American literary production based in doubling consciousness, inhabiting and yet challenging American literary structures and ideologies based in an ongoing distinct cultural experience of and in the United States.

In Warren's hands African American literature begins to look like a historical error produced solely by the injustice of Jim Crow racism—just as retrospectively Americans like to construct their (ongoing) racism as a historical error produced singularly by the successive institutions of chattel enslavement and Jim Crow segregation. (For Warren slavery is conveniently immaterial to African American literature because African Americans did not exist before the erection of Jim Crow segregation as national law in the 1890s.) Regardless of Warren's politics, his book performs gargantuan ideological work in neatly reaffirming what is felt to be in jeopardy at this moment of a messily divided red-blue (which euphemistically codes white-black) body politic: the sentimental yearning for a patriotically unified populace, one nation indivisible, able to transcend the increasingly divisive crises of its own (un)making.

Warren purposively avoids such larger issues to advance instead a narrow argument trained on a handful of novels and literary manifestos written at the nadir of Jim Crow. By evading these larger questions, however, *What Was African American Literature?* seems to scapegoat African American literature by evacuating it of culture, with all its messy, pleasurable (dis)affiliations and (dis)identifications.<sup>3</sup> A literature made by fiat of national law can be unmade by such fiat. Cultures, the infrastructure of literature, cannot be made by fiat, legal or otherwise. They are constructed through the need to form, and make meaning of, the myriad conflicting associations (by blood, custom, and sociohistorical circumstance) that humans enjoy and suffer in networks of belonging. Literature, as a manifestation of culture, helps to create a sense of a people's distinctness, always an authenticating fiction itself, rather than the other way around. Seeking to understand African American literature in a cultural vacuum feeds the desire to be rid of African American culture as an experience distinct to the United States. For if African Americans insist on being experientially bonded, however self-contentiously, in a distinct culture, what does this bode for a patriotically unified American culture's ability not just to transcend but to obliterate racial identification as a vector of national (un)belonging?

To mount an apologia for the continuing vitality of African American literature only accedes to the terms that Warren has set, terms that put literature in a vacuum, reduce it to belles lettres, and divorce it from the complex cultural nexus in which it functions as one means of cultural expression. Rising to defend African American literature distracts us from the more compelling questions about the impact of legal desegregation on African American and American cultural expression, particularly given that institutional desegregation seems not to have diminished cultural segregation in America. That so many

African Americans read contemporary texts (capaciously defined)—often those beneath Warren’s notice (110–11)—to collectively understand and express their ongoing cultural (dis)affiliation is an interesting fact of the “post-Jim Crow” era. Whether Terry McMillan’s *Waiting to Exhale* (1992) or E. Lynn Harris’s best-selling *Invisible Life* (1991), whether Tyler Perry’s prolific fare or BET’s popular gospel-competition show *Sunday’s Best*, whether one of the various Internet blogs like *The Root* or an August Wilson play staged by one of the many regional African American theater companies—all of which are available for non-African American perusal—such cultural expressions bespeak a literary inheritance renewing itself by adapting not only to racial pressures and pleasures beyond historical Jim Crow but also to newfangled technologies of racial (dis)identification not dreamed of in 1900. Pace Warren’s *What Was African American Literature?*, our task as literary and cultural critics is to get on with the business of interpreting and contextualizing the diversity of such materials in the light of the changing cultural (including racial) situation.

## NOTES

1. It would be helpful to keep in mind the distinction between desegregation, the process of selectively admit-

ting token individuals into majority institutions that formerly excluded all those identified as belonging to their race, and integration, the radical reordering of all social institutions to account for the ongoing social, political, and economic inequities based in racial hierarchies. As Michelle Alexander and others have pointed out, Jim Crow effectively still exists because one set of racial barriers and exclusions has been replaced with another set designed to lock out the majority of African Americans after the legal disestablishment of segregation.

2. I have elsewhere observed how Warren relies on the nineteenth-century Germanic notion of a “distinct people” rather than on a more theoretically nuanced concept of literature as the historical production of a culture that is always self-contested, so I set this problem aside.

3. Muñoz elaborates the theory of culture as a process of (dis)identification—that is, defining oneself in connection or opposition to an oppressed group and the dominating norm (12–31).

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## The Future of the Present

XIOMARA SANTAMARINA

Kenneth W. Warren offers a salutary historicizing of the field of African American literary studies that reaffirms the historical and, hence, provisional nature of group identity. His book

*What Was African American Literature?* views black literary studies through a skeptical lens that reveals the discipline’s continuing investments in cultural “blackness” as nostalgic,



transhistorical, and exceptionalist. In much the same way, scholars of United States history and literature have deconstructed—with little controversy—the transhistorical notion of America and exposed the Cold War origins of “American studies.” Yet responses to *What Was African American Literature?* have been at best lukewarm and at worst harshly critical. Why do the implications of Warren’s argument seem so worrisome? Do they suggest we must choose between the field’s historical and theoretical integrity and its institutional existence? Can the critical tradition of African American literature retain its institutional authority and its progressive political integrity without resorting to anachronistic concepts of black particularity, concepts through which “the limitations of the black condition get rewritten as a paradoxically fortunate turn” (19)?

Presumably Warren’s critics would agree with his periodizing of African American literary studies as a “corporate enterprise” aimed at exposing and dismantling Jim Crow discrimination (18). But many express anxiety over an apparently wholesale dismantling of a central, cherished warrant for the field. Warren’s description of the political and strategic origins of black particularity ruptures the tacit consensus that tethers African American literature to racial identity: it exposes the roots of black literary responses to Jim Crow in a politics of collective racial identity rather than in an ascribed racial identity per se. The difference is one of “achiev[ing] a literature,” not simply “achiev[ing] in literature” (16). A distinct literature carries the weight of group aspirations and collective responsibility in a way that values the expression of group consciousness over and above an individual’s freedom to pursue his or her aesthetic vision on a humanist or universal plane. W. E. B. Du Bois’s injunction in “The Conservation of Races” is perhaps one of the most familiar formulations of group consciousness as a race “mission” aimed at “develop[ing] its own message or gift to the world” (820–21).

But if we acknowledge the past status of black particularity as a political, conceptual formation that emerged at a historical moment, what will ground the field of black literature and criticism? Can, or should, ascriptive identity as black continue to serve as a key warrant for the discipline, absent a consensus on the formation and meaning of race? If not, is there an alternative warrant that could successfully uphold the field’s institutional authority? This raises what may be the trickiest question of all: does the legitimacy of African American literary studies necessarily depend on or, even worse, mandate the continued subaltern status of the population it purports to represent? Warren’s depiction of the status quo as antidemocratic suggests this is precisely the case.

Warren’s critique of literary study as a bourgeois project may give academics reason to worry that their Oz-like authority exists on borrowed time, but they can take comfort in the fact that they share Warren’s desire to confront social inequality. Warren does not argue that racial inequality is a thing of the past—he proposes the opposite, that today’s challenges to postsegregation inequality demand that we refashion the foundational concepts on which we in the academy base our criticism. His central, counterintuitive gesture is to suggest that chucking or giving up the past and its iterations of black particularity might be a more effective way of producing progressive political transformations. Truly democratic political projects, argues Warren, following the critic Terry Eagleton, should focus on the transformation, not the affirmation, of social identities.

But what would a *transformed* rather than *affirmed* identity look like in an egalitarian society? Warren turns to Du Bois’s “Criteria of Negro Art” to explore this question. In this essay, Du Bois asks his intended black readers to imagine how reality would differ if they were white—would they all be richer? Would universal access to material

prosperity be an index of equality? As Du Bois admonishes, “[T]hese are not the things you really want.” Those “pushed aside . . . in America,” he concludes, know better, for they “have a vision of what the world could be if it were really a beautiful world.” But what is the cognitive content or form of this vision, if it isn’t “tawdry” wealth (994)? In the face of this uncertainty about the form and content of equality, our refusal to relinquish racial particularity has some logic: if we think the chance of equality is a slim one, as Du Bois came around to thinking in the 1940s, then why not hold on to blackness and demand recognition or affirmation as some kind of middle ground that might sustain emancipatory projects (Warren 50)? Recognition, it would seem, offers some kind of payoff even if it’s a short-term one, in comparison to the remote possibility of an equality that would render racial particularity superfluous.

Warren’s critique of exceptionalist black particularity, whether recognized, affirmed, or transformed, suggests a pressing need to adapt antiracism to present-day conditions. Still, questions remain: Do we need race—of any kind—to justify antiracism? And is there an antiracist aesthetic? Given Warren’s assertion that anachronistic racial particularity, or a belief in a distinct, collective African American literature, is “symptomatic of larger inequalities” and not their cure—are there cures (148)? What are they?

Warren’s loudest silence pertains to the question of how literature—any literature or any form of cultural production—could promote equality. In the end, his speculation is unconvincing: “To be sure, there is nothing wrong with investing in the idea that the writ-

ing of literature and literary criticism and history might in some way promote social justice” (148). “Nothing wrong” and “might in some way” suggest that for Warren such an investment takes us to terra incognita, or even terra nullius. Perhaps the present moment calls for us to explore aesthetic theories, as some have begun to do, that could engage and give shape to a collective enterprise of African American literature in a nonanachronistic way—in a way that profits populations who in theory have a voice guaranteed by a democratic state yet still live in a twilight world of compromised choices (Castronovo; Shockley). What would such literature(s) look like? Can such a “retooling” produce or identify a distinct literature written by African Americans—not simply members of an ascriptive group—directed at contributing to national, liberatory projects? Or does a literature that points the way through “racial equality” to universal forms of social justice, without reproducing essentialist identities, exist only in a world elsewhere?

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## What Is African American Literature?

RAFIA ZAFAR

Kenneth W. Warren and I share common ground; you might even say that our ponderings describe a Venn diagram of black literary criticism, one that reveals overlapping terrain and areas that touch not at all. On the one hand he says, “African American literature was a post emancipation phenomenon that gained its coherence in the social world defined by Jim Crow segregation” (1), and on the other I observe that “the ever-receding achievements of Reconstruction, systematic lynchings, and nonstop civil and social sanctions seemed to spark a resurgence of writing and publication” (189). For both of us the historical and political facts of the late nineteenth century engendered a clear sense among African American folks of what gains had been lost. Warren’s recent positing of the end of black literature in the United States—*What Was African American Literature?*—argues, however, that we should place one stage of writing by authors of African descent in a specific historical context. In essence he suggests there is a time-bound parameter around what we call African American literature. My initial response was simple: What purpose is served by proposing an end to African American literature? Warren notes that African American “literature of [a certain] moment was oriented by the effort to change or repeal the laws that significantly shaped black social and political life from the 1890s through the 1960s” (96). He gets no argument from me that black authors before the civil rights era sought to promote equality of treatment of “the darker races,”<sup>1</sup> but they also desired to craft literature of the human spirit—longing, desire, despair, and all that. I would like to agree to disagree, suggesting several things that should be considered before dispensing with the rubric African American literature.

Some years ago I remarked on the concatenation of political and historical events that led to an African American literary consciousness: “The writers of the nadir and immediately after . . . strove to create a more culturally specific literature within a structurally rigid society.” I went on to assert that “two national literatures” became “inevitable . . . [if not] necessarily . . . undesirable” (190). When I examined the generic experiments American authors of African descent employed before 1900—be it Phillis Wheatley’s *Poems on Various Subjects*, Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative*, or Eliza Potter’s *A Hair-Dresser’s Experience in High Life*—it seemed clear to me that whether calling themselves African, Aframerican, or colored, such authors were concerned with reaching a mainstream audience, if for reasons different from the following generations’. By staking their claim to a citizenship of literacy, even if at the time that status could realistically be described as proleptic, black writers did set the stage for what Warren has called a literary “entity . . . defined by the assumptions and practices of the segregation era” (9). Yet the corollary of crafting a literature aimed at eliminating social and political repression would be, according to Warren, that in the wake of crucial political gains—that is, an age of desegregation exemplified by *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Voting Rights Act and civil rights acts of the 1960s—African American literature as previously constituted can no longer exist. One can agree with this assessment if one believes that African American literature before the 1970s was written merely as a bulwark and psychological defense against legal segregation—that it was frequently “instrumental” (Warren 10). Nevertheless, despite any collective desire to move beyond discussions of race, and despite

many changes in the juridical landscape since 1896, unequal social conditions continue to shape much literature by Americans of African descent. The category African American literature does not need to be retired; we need instead to further contextualize, periodize, and particularize its currents in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Rather than embargo the field within a specific time slot, let us begin by moving toward a more inclusive understanding. Warren's continuum of African American authors does not display a wealth of women in its firmament, whether during the heyday of the Harlem Renaissance, during that movement's supposed period of declension, or in the decades that follow. How might the shape of his discussion alter if the analyses of male authors and critics were joined by similar exegeses of women writers? While Toni Morrison comes in for her righteous due, Ann Petry gets mentioned but twice—despite the interesting progression that racial subjects take in the course of her three novels. Including the disparate work of late-twentieth-century authors like Octavia Butler and Danzy Senna might fruitfully complicate Warren's narrative. African American women's literature and its criticism have long grappled with the quotidian drags on selfhood and identity determined by the crossroads of race and sex. That particularity should not occlude women's participation in the long account of black literature and criticism.

Finally, the arc of literary history is unnecessarily shortened by historicizing African American literature on the basis of narrative. In mapping this trajectory into the future we must appreciate its multiple main currents and various tributaries. Eschewing dramatists and poets of the latter part of the twentieth century, whether Adrienne Kennedy and August Wilson, or Rita Dove and Etheridge Knight, keeps us from tackling the unpredictability and zigzags of the creative muse. African American literature cannot be fully accounted for if we examine fiction and autobiographies

alone. Genres other than prose (and prose considered "genre") present exegetical challenges and rewards to us story-bound creatures. An author can be postmodern, genre-shifting, and race-identified at the same time—or by turns. And if an author seeks to write without aiming for a socially conscious end, what of it? Periodization, while convenient in constructing a syllabus, can detach writing by black Americans from its evolving continuum.

We may be past Supreme Court-dictated Jim Crow, but the growing numbers of African Americans caught up in the penal system eerily echo segregation: "We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it" (Alexander 2). That ominous harbinger does not stop me from using the category African American literature. The thoughts and intentions of its practitioners are too various for me to evaluate on the basis of whether a text explicitly takes up the cause of social justice. Warren's bold and lively assertions are not meant, I firmly believe, to be prescriptive. I welcome his remarks as predicting and participating in the ongoing and vigorous debate our profession must continue if we hope to remain relevant—whether to the cause of social justice and equality or to the requirements of a liberal arts education.

## NOTE

1. The *Crisis*, the official periodical of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, bore the subtitle *A Record of the Darker Races* from its founding, in 1910, until at least February 1934.

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## A Reply to My Critics

KENNETH W. WARREN

*I do not expect to disarm criticism, an impossible ideal under any circumstances and one particularly out of place in a book that apprehends itself to be saying something new. Rather, I hope to remove grounds for misunderstanding, so that those who are driven to complain about what I have done will at least have an unobstructed view of their target.*

—Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot*

I wrote *What Was African American Literature?* with the hope of clarifying what the term *African American literature* could mean. What prompted the attempt was my sense that scholars have produced a range of often incompatible ways of defining our “object of study,” as demonstrated by the welter of terms on display in these responses, which variously declare African American literature a genre, a canon, a set of tropes, a tradition, a shared affinity, and so on. This is not to say that scholarship on African American literature is particularly imprecise. Delimiting literatures is a difficult task, and scholars in most fields often play a little fast and loose with the terms they use to designate the body of texts they work on. Nonetheless, I’ve never subscribed to the idea that because imprecision prevails elsewhere in literary study, scholars of African American literature should let themselves off the hook in this regard. Of course, with greater precision comes the possibility of strong disagreement, which, if principled, is all to the good of the field.

No one disputes that over the first two-thirds of the twentieth century literary writing by African Americans and the pronouncements of black creative writers figured prominently in the political and social discussions of racial inequality. Nor would many dispute that black writing considered collectively has made its claim on our atten-

tion at least in part because the connection between literary production and the problem of black political subordination has seemed so obvious. As I note in the first chapter of my book, James Weldon Johnson opines “that there is not a single Negro writer who is not, at least secondarily, impelled by the desire to make his work have some effect on the white world for the good of his race” (qtd. in Warren 10). The sticking point for many of my readers, however, is my argument that absent the exclusion of the black population en masse from politics in the South beginning in the 1890s, also known as Jim Crow, and the resulting politics of racial appeal in which strategically positioned blacks (and whites) sought to represent and speak on behalf of the disfranchised black population, there would have been no imperative to consider black writing as a separate or distinct literature. To be sure, as I make clear in my book, had the Jim Crow regime been throttled in its fetid cradle, African American writers would nonetheless have produced compelling novels, plays, short stories, and other works, but the imperative to regard their work as a literature apart would likely not have emerged. African American literature was the historical relation of literary production by black writers (along with the reception of and commentary on these texts) to the social and political fact of black inequality that was codified by the legal regime of Jim Crow. That relation underwrote the presumption—and gave coherence to the claim—that despite the vast differences among black writers, in terms of what they wrote about, the forms they chose, the stylistic decisions they made, and so on, their work collectively constituted a literature. It was by virtue of this relation that events in the domain of literature—say, the selection of *Native Son* for the Book-of-the-Month Club, or the awarding of the Pulitzer Prize to Gwendolyn

Brooks in 1950, or the decision of a major black writer to write about white rather than black characters—were, so to speak, automatically considered events in the struggle against constitutionally sanctioned Jim Crow.

Once you take in the notion that African American literature denotes a historical relation—that is, a literary period—you can see the irrelevance of objections that the argument of *What Was African American Literature?* is incomplete because it fails to devote sufficient attention to certain genres, forms, or groups of writers in that period. The writings of black poets and playwrights composed during the years of Jim Crow *all* count as African American literature. Indeed, *pace* Glenda R. Carpio, Zora Neale Hurston presents no problem for my argument because Hurston's complaints about the "sobbing school of Negrohood" and the like exemplify my point that even for authors who insisted on writing "without reference to the political or social status of the black race, . . . the mere insistence was an acknowledgment of the pressure" to write in behalf of their race (13). I chose texts that enabled me to illustrate my points efficiently; however, the argument would not have changed had I selected a different group of writers or texts because what make these texts African American literature are not textual properties they share but rather a politico-historical relation among them. For that reason *What Was African Literature?* neither prescribes nor proscribes the aspects of a text on which a critic ought to focus. Scholars are free to comment on a poem's joy or exuberance or the lack thereof. But my argument makes clear that it would be a mistake to declare that exuberance, joy, the blues, or some other property makes a text a work of African American literature.

My book, then, is not a demonstration of what makes African American texts literary. I assume the literariness of these texts and that any account of a text's literariness will in some way or another exceed the conditions

that make it a work of African American literature. Literariness, after all, is not unique to African American literary texts. Rather, I seek to bring to the surface the historical relation that constitutes these literary texts collectively as African American literature. But this argument is not indifferent to aesthetic concerns, because it also reveals the aesthetic drama generated by the way that African American writers, in the face of a Jim Crow America, sought to rewrite political contingency into the necessity of tradition and culture, transform the imposed into the willed, assert the primacy of form over content, and whistle blithely past social restrictions and expectations. Of course, one can truly appreciate this drama only if one recognizes the distinct political and social pressures of the Jim Crow era.

The significance that I attach to the Jim Crow era has, however, generated a second set of complaints. Rafia Zafar, whose fine study *We Wear the Mask: African Americans Write American Literature* largely confirms that before the late nineteenth century black writers considered themselves not writers of African American literature but contributors to American literature, nonetheless objects to the idea that literary production by black writers after Jim Crow does not count as African American literature and even to the idea that Jim Crow has ended. In the opinion of practically all the respondents here, Michelle Alexander's book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* demonstrates that Jim Crow hasn't ended because so many black men have been victimized by mass incarceration and have lost their right to participate in politics as a result. Gene Andrew Jarrett also contends that recent historical scholarship, which has focused on practices of segregation in the antebellum North, renders dubious any claim that Jim Crow is a late-nineteenth-century phenomenon.

It's no surprise given the popularity of Alexander's thesis that her work is mentioned



in relation to any argument about Jim Crow. What is surprising is how readily my critics have embraced her book as demonstrating that current carceral practices and policies constitute a new Jim Crow, when Alexander's own words are much less definitive (and sometimes contradictory). For example, she claims that her "book argues that mass incarceration is, *metaphorically*, the New Jim Crow" (emphasis mine) and that mass incarceration "functions in a manner strikingly similar to Jim Crow," "is analogous to Jim Crow," and frequently is "like Jim Crow." But she also cautions, "Those who claim that mass incarceration is 'just like' Jim Crow make a serious mistake" (11, 4, 60, 17, 197).

It is indeed a serious mistake. Put simply, Jim Crow was a caste system that emerged from the successful effort of southern white elites to reestablish class dominance in the South in the wake of the cross-racial insurgency that was Populism. This system certainly placed whites over blacks, but it also placed white landowners and capitalists over white labor. State-enforced and state-mandated, Jim Crow established the presumption of white domination and superiority as the norm governing all interracial social interactions in the South. It was partly for this reason that evidence of black achievement and excellence could appear destabilizing to the justifications of the regime as a whole. The challenge for those who use Alexander to fault my book for stipulating that the major court rulings, legislative acts, and policy changes from the 1950s through the end of the 1960s constitute the end of Jim Crow is to demonstrate how mass incarceration, which Alexander deems only to be very much like Jim Crow, sustains the same set of social and cultural relations that determined the role of literature under Jim Crow. It seems almost silly to point out that while the awarding of the Nobel Prize in Literature to Toni Morrison in 1993 was a literary event, it was not taken as an event in the legal struggle

against mass incarceration, notwithstanding that one of the characters in *Beloved* is a victim of the convict-lease system. Merely claiming that literary writing by black Americans constitutes a literature does not align it with struggles against mass incarceration.

Another charge about the archive of my book misses the point as well. Sonnet Retman believes that had my discussion of recent works included "black women writers and queer writers of color" and "black feminist literary criticism and queer-of-color critique," I might have registered the "possibility of more-radical traditions and conceptions of African American literature that query past and present conditions of racial capitalism and heteropatriarchy." Nothing in my argument denies that some African American literary writings challenged patriarchy and capitalism or that current writers have mined these works for strategies and tropes to inform their own critiques. But to find in African American literature resources for contemporary political challenges is not to identify African American literature with those challenges.

Yet, given that, as Retman and Marlon B. Ross observe, myriad forms of affiliation, including those formed around the reading and writing of literature, exist among African Americans, why not simply allow that contemporary writing by black Americans is African American literature but in a new register? To see the problem in doing so, one needs to see that the term *African American* does not merely point to what we by habit or custom already "know" as African American but also seeks to perform a relation between the doings or expressions of some black Americans and the situation of black Americans in general (and sometimes even across time). Jim Crow established the conditions in which literature produced by black Americans could performatively be African American literature by making the production of literature matter in relation to the status and condition of black Americans as a

whole. Today, however, the term performs in one direction only—invoking the idea of general race interest to lend prestige and gravitas to the doings and expressions of some black Americans in their various spheres of operation without producing reciprocal benefits for the larger constituency being invoked.

In this light, one can see the problem with Xiomara Santamarina's suggestion about how my book might address more fully "the question of how literature—any literature or any form of cultural production—could promote equality." After describing compellingly the anxieties provoked by my argument, Santamarina goes on to fault me for not responding to the "pressing need to adapt antiracism to present-day conditions." But antiracism already *is* the politics of the present. As Adolph Reed recently wrote in "The Limits of Anti-racism," we live "under a regime now that is capable simultaneously of including black people and Latinos, even celebrating that inclusion as a fulfillment of democracy, while excluding poor people without a whimper of opposition."

Retman strives to make this point in her response but doesn't register that the very idea of African American literature at present asserts the priority of fighting racial discrimination over other forms of inequality. As I point out in the conclusion of *What Was African American Literature?*, Michael Thomas's novel *Man Gone Down* (2007) wrestles with the problem of reconciling the knowledge that in terms of inequality "the only relevant divide was those who could afford to pay and those who could not" (122) with the knowledge that as a black man shopping in trendy Manhattan stores the novel's unnamed protagonist still gets "eyeballed like he doesn't belong" by whites who "lack the imagination to understand that [he likes] olive oil" as much as they do (101). The point is not that Thomas's protagonist can't lament at the same time that some people can't afford to buy olive oil at trendy Manhattan

stores and that some of those who can afford to pay are discriminated against when they attempt to do so. We do have to see, however, that from the standpoint of antiracism, not being able to afford olive oil can be a problem only if your economic privation can be described as a form of racial discrimination. *Man Gone Down* shows that a novel that gets us to care about whether its protagonist can keep his mixed-race kids in their expensive private school and guarantee that they are treated well by their teachers and classmates can't easily align our sympathies simultaneously with the fact that we would strike a more fundamental blow for educational justice (one that would enormously benefit black and brown children) by abolishing private K-12 schooling altogether. The novel demonstrates brilliantly what Walter Benn Michaels has said in a discussion of a photograph by Jeff Wall: that while it's not a "logical requirement" that we choose "between fighting racism and fighting economic inequality," it is "a historical fact" that we have done so (183).

Thomas's novel is, among other things, a political critique. But it's difficult to see that its critique hangs on defining it as African American literature, as Santamarina would maintain. The question of whether *Man Gone Down* counts as African American literature is a matter for course syllabi, publishing-house marketers, and perhaps English departments that must choose between "contemporary American literature" and "contemporary African American literature" when advertising a job opening. The only constituency inconvenienced by a conclusion that Thomas's novel isn't African American literature is the cadre of writers, scholars, critics, and readers who want to insist that it is, which is another way of saying that their politics is merely an elite politics. To be sure, the politics of African American literature (like all literary politics) was elite-driven, but the politics of Jim Crow worked to secure literary activity to the political interests of nonelite



blacks. This is not to say that African American literature was some sort of historical error or that African American writers should have made this literature differently. They made it in the only way that they could, by seeking to put literature in some relation to the interests of blacks generally. My contemporaries' mistake is their failure to realize that when they invoke terms like *folk* and *vernacular*, they are employing notions that as Adolph Reed and I have argued elsewhere "emerged within the patterns of elite discourse that evolved between the second half of the nineteenth century and the middle of the twentieth" (viii).

While there are many creditable ways of teaching the texts that constitute African American literature (i.e., the literature published by black Americans from the late nineteenth century through the early 1970s), it would be a curricular deficiency if an English department offered no courses on this period that treated these works as African American literature because one cannot tell or even understand the history of American literature without telling the history of African American literature. By contrast, while it would likewise be a curricular deficiency if no courses in a department's contemporary literature offerings included works by African American writers, it is merely a matter of instructor discretion whether or not a department includes courses focusing solely on contemporary African American writers.

Anyone reading my book will see the falsity of Ross's charge that its argument "relies on the nineteenth-century Germanic notion of a 'distinct people'" and "reduce[s]" literature to "belles lettres," so no further comment on this is required. Ross is, however, right in saying that African American literature needs no defense from me. Asking what African American literature was does not attack it any more than asking what Victorian literature was attacks that literature. Nor does concluding that some works don't count as African American literature deprecate those

works. To think so would be to view an argument that author X is not a Victorian but a Romantic writer as an insult to author X. Too many scholars treat African American literature as an honorific rather than as an analytic category, and instead of assuming the validity of the literature they study, they see their primary task as attesting to its prestige.

R. Baxter Miller's response does me the courtesy of mentioning several of my other works, although from his critique it's not clear that he understands them. My work as a whole has interrogated two of the major projects associated with African American literary scholarship. One is determining how best to account for the field's object of study. That, of course, is the goal of *What Was African American Literature?* The other is assessing how black-white racial difference has affected the production and the study of literature more broadly. This is what my first book, *Black and White Strangers: Race and American Literary Realism*, took up. What appears to have gotten Miller's knickers in a knot is my first book's contention—which seems to me irrefutable—that pursuing this project thoroughly requires interrogating non-African Americanist literature, perhaps even, God help us, the works of Henry James. (One has to wonder how Miller feels about Toni Morrison's discussion of Ernest Hemingway and Willa Cather in *Playing in the Dark*.) If Miller and Ross are threatened by the questions I have asked, they must also be threatened by many of the writers they study for whom questioning the coherence, permanence, and efficacy of what they were doing as writers was not anathema but part of the challenge and thrill of being a writer of African American literature.

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## NOTE

My thanks go to Mark Seltzer for alerting me to the performative dimensions of my argument.

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## The Meaning of the Digital Humanities

ALAN LIU

### WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES TO THE HUMANITIES?

This question of disciplinary meaning—which I ask from the viewpoint of the humanities generally—is larger than the question of disciplinary identity now preoccupying “DH” itself, as insiders call it. Having reached a critical mass of participants, publications, conferences, grant competitions, institutionalization (centers, programs, and advertised jobs), and general visibility, the field is vigorously forming an identity.<sup>1</sup> Recent debates about whether the digital humanities are a “big tent” (Jockers and Worthey), “who’s in and who’s out?” (Ramsay), whether “you have to know how to code [or be a builder]” (Ramsay, “On Building”), the need for “more hack, less yack” (Cecire, “When Digital Humanities”; Koh), and “who you calling untheoretical?” (Bauer) witness a dialectics of inclusion and exclusion not unlike that of past emergent fields.<sup>2</sup> An ethnographer of the field, indeed, might take a page from Claude Lévi-Strauss and chart the current digital humanities as something like a grid of affiliations and differences between neighboring tribes. Exaggerating the differences somewhat, as when a tribe boasts its uniqueness, we can thus say that the digital humanities—much of which affiliates with older humanities disciplines such as literature, history, classics, and the languages; with the remediation of older media such as books and libraries; and ultimately with the value of the old itself (history, archives, the curatorial mission)—are not the tribe of “new media studies,” under the sway of the design, visual, and media arts; Continental theory; cultural criticism; and the avant-garde new.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, despite significant trends toward networked and multimodal work spanning social, visual, aural, and haptic media, much of the digital humanities focuses on documents and texts in a way that distinguishes the field’s work from digital research in media studies, communication studies, information studies, and sociology. And the digital humanities are exploring new repertoires of interpretive or expressive “algorithmic criticism” (the “second wave” of the digital humanities proclaimed

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in “The Digital Humanities Manifesto 2.0” [3]) in a way that makes the field not even its earlier self, “humanities computing,” alleged to have had narrower technical and service-oriented aims.<sup>4</sup> Recently, the digital humanities’ limited engagement with identity and social-justice issues has also been seen to be a differentiating trait—for example, by the vibrant #transformDH collective, which worries that the digital humanities (unlike some areas of new media studies) are dominantly not concerned with race, gender, alternative sexualities, or disability.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, there are overlaps of people and methods between tribes—to the point that, taking another page from Lévi-Strauss, we would want to mention trickster figures embodying both sides of digital humanities’ differences. One such trickster is the field of book history. Prolific in its revisionary studies of matril texts, ephemera, marginalia, social reading, publishing history, and so on, book history now partly parallels post-McLuhan media studies. Peter Stallybrass argues, for instance, that “the codex and the printed book were the indexical computers that Christianity adopted” as its “technology of discontinuity” (74, 73). Book history therefore overlaps on its new-media-studies side with media archaeology (especially in the German lineage well represented in this context by Cornelia Vismann’s *Files: Law and Media Technology*) and on its digital humanities side with approaches to digital texts rooted in revisionary textual editing, bibliography as the sociology of texts, and the materiality of the digital.<sup>6</sup> A similar trickster is science and technology studies (STS), which are curiously underrepresented in both new media studies and the digital humanities even as they are clearly relevant in a way represented by such scholars as N. Katherine Hayles and Tim Lenoir. So, too, historical sociology—which now applies social-network analysis to document corpora—is a trickster splitting the difference between the social sciences and the digital humanities, the latter of which also in-

creasingly use social-network analysis to study plays, novels, literary reception, history, and so on.<sup>7</sup> And of the communities of people who overlap, trickster-like, between the digital humanities and new media studies, the HASTAC collaboratory—which has had enormous success tapping into the energies especially of graduate students (“HASTAC Scholars”)—is perhaps the most coyote.

Yet even if we were to complete our hypothetical ethnographer’s chart, it would not adequately explain the digital humanities. We would be leaving unexplained the relation of the digital humanities to the humanities generally. My thesis is that an understanding of the digital humanities can only rise to the level of an explanation if we see that the underlying issue is the disciplinary identity not of the digital humanities but of the humanities themselves. For the humanities, the digital humanities exceed (though they include) the functional role of instrument or service, the pioneer role of innovator, the ensemble role of an “additional field,” and even such faux-political roles assigned to new fields as challenger, reformer, and (less positively) fifth column. This is because the digital humanities also have a symbolic role. In both their promise and their threat, the digital humanities serve as a shadow play for a future form of the humanities that wishes to include what contemporary society values about the digital without losing its soul to other domains of knowledge work that have gone digital to stake their claim to that society. Or, precisely because the digital humanities are both functional and symbolic, a better metaphor would be something like the register in a computer’s central processor unit, where values stored in memory are loaded for rapid shuffling, manipulation, and testing—in this case, to try out new humanistic disciplinary identities evolved for today’s broader contention of knowledges and knowledge workers.

The question of the meaning of the digital humanities best opens such an argument to



view because it registers both a specific problem in the digital humanities and the larger crisis of the meaningfulness of today's humanities.

Meaning is clearly a metavalue and also metaproblem for the digital humanities. To unpack this meaning problem, I will spotlight a recent work of digital literary scholarship by two beginning scholars that is state-of-the-art and representative of major trends in the digital humanities—a tactic that has the additional advantage of providing outsiders to the field with an end-to-end look at an example of research by digital humanists. The work is Ryan Heuser and Long Le-Khac's *A Quantitative Literary History of 2,958 Nineteenth-Century British Novels: The Semantic Cohort Method* (2012), the fourth of the influential digital pamphlets issued by the Stanford Literary Lab.<sup>8</sup> Heuser and Le-Khac report on their innovations in the methods of "distant reading" and text mining that are the signatures of the lab (where they worked with Matthew L. Jockers, Franco Moretti, and others), and they do so with a methodological self-awareness that puts the meaning problem front and center. They reflect near their opening:

[W]hat is the *meaning* of changes in word usage frequencies? What do we do with such data? With much current research drawing on word frequencies and other quantifiable aspects of culture, these are big questions. We can see now that the greatest challenge of developing digital humanities methods may not be how to cull data from humanistic objects, but how to analyze that data in *meaningfully* interpretable ways. (4; my emphases)

And they add in their concluding section:

The general methodological problem of the digital humanities can be bluntly stated: How do we get from numbers to *meaning*? The objects being tracked, the evidence collected, the ways they're analyzed—all of these are quantitative. How to move from this kind of evidence and

object to qualitative arguments and insights about humanistic subjects—culture, literature, art, etc.—is not clear. (46; my emphasis)

Throughout, Heuser and Le-Khac give *meaning* a gravity that indicates that in the digital humanities the meaning problem has roughly the same weight as the "saving the phenomena" problem in the philosophy of science—the problem, that is, of relating empirically observed phenomena to explainable, theorizable, or predictable ("saved") phenomena. In essence, Heuser and Le-Khac are out to "save the data" by making it meaningful.<sup>9</sup> The form of data they wish to save is quantitative.

Of course, no single example can typify all aspects of the booming field of digital humanities. So before we examine the specifics of the meaning problem in this instance, it will be useful to make four observations that relate Heuser and Le-Khac's research to other work in the digital humanities. The meaning problem may not be as central everywhere, but its frame of analysis is convertible to other frames so that we can see that many parts of the field link up to the same cluster of issues. The following is a kind of conversion table for relating Heuser and Le-Khac's work to other digital humanities areas.

First, we note that Heuser and Le-Khac select their research material from already digitized texts (2,958 British novels from 1785 to 1895, all from *The Internet Archive* except for 250 from Chadwyck-Healey).<sup>10</sup> This means that their work belongs not in the orbit of digitizing, text encoding, publishing, or archiving (activities characteristic of many projects in digital editing, collecting, and curating) but in that of processing and analyzing already built digital repositories (in the manner of projects in text analysis, social-network analysis, visualization, spatial history, etc.). Still, the digital humanities are young enough that these two broad modes of work are not fully specialized. On the one hand, leading text-encoding and digital-

archiving projects find it necessary to create their own analytic, processing, and visualization tools to present materials. And, on the other hand, text-analysis, visualization, and other processing projects often have to go to great lengths to select, clean, and prepare pre-existent digital materials as a usable corpus.

Second, while Heuser and Le-Khac formulate their meaning problem in terms of quantification, that is not the only possible formulation. Quantification is indeed a key digital humanities issue, especially when linked to sheer quantity in the wake of recent “big data” funding competitions in the field. But digital humanists also have nonquantitative ways of putting the meaning problem. One is the idea of models (and modeling processes) as richly developed, for example, by Willard McCarty. Models reveal meaning (recognized in patterns, trends, forms) only by reducing the dimensions and features of meaning. Diagrammatic models, especially the visualizations proliferating in the digital humanities (including Heuser and Le-Khac’s essay), are a case in point, since large discourse networks (visualized through such tools as *Gephi*) are comprehensible when their scope or detail is kept low but otherwise grow into beautifully mystifying galaxies of nodes and links. Another case in point is the kind of textual model (instantiated in document-type definitions [DTDs] and XML schemas) that enables text encoding. A well-known debate in the digital humanities thus concerns whether the principle of an ordered hierarchy of content objects (OHCO) underlying such models makes texts machine-readable only by disallowing the full range of what Jerome McGann calls human-readable “overlapping” and “recursive structures” (“Position Statement”).

Third, even if we concentrate on quantification as the key meaning problem, it makes a difference which disciplinary branch of the digital humanities we are dealing with, since digital history and digital literary studies, to take two major branches, arrive at quantifica-

tion through different routes and at different stages. Digital history emerged in a discipline that had already forcefully experienced numerical method—for example, the quantitative side of the *Annales* school and cliometrics. Perhaps as a result, digital history is farther along than most digital humanities branches in molding quantitative work to a related heritage of *Annales* method: spatial and cartographic history. The state of the art in digital history, as it were, is Fernand Braudel plus satellite mapping (Seefeldt and Thomas; Owens).

Fourth, Heuser and Le-Khac’s research required a combination of skills in programming and interpretation, thus addressing the “do you have to be a builder?” question that has recently bedeviled the digital humanities by answering, in effect, “you have to be both a builder and an interpreter.” Less interesting than this question itself, which is based on an increasingly obsolete notion of solo work in which one is either a builder or interpreter, is the way Heuser and Le-Khac are both builders and interpreters: through rich collaboration. Here we reach the outer limits of the frame of the meaning problem, where it converts into a coextensive frame. Just as meaning is both a metavalue and a metaproblem, so is collaboration as it bears on such urgent issues in the digital humanities as coauthorship, collective project building, multigraph books, open peer review, social media, crowdsourcing, and the hiring and promotion implications of all these. Rather than explore the collaboration problem in its own frame here, I note only that it is fundamentally convertible to the meaning problem. For example, the question of what kind of knowledge is produced by “the wisdom of the crowd,” “collective intelligence,” “the long tail,” “the hive mind,” “folksonomy,” and so on (dominant memes of Web 2.0) is essentially a question about the meaning of the social version of big data, the big crowd. The mind, or mindlessness, of that crowd has been a core problem of modernity since at least the French Revolution.



With these observations as a guide for relating Heuser and Le-Khac's work to other emphases in the digital humanities, we can now look closely at their pamphlet. The meaning problem comes to the fore there as a consequence of Heuser and Le-Khac's key research innovation. They report on their use of a tool they created called *Correlator*, which, when fed "seed words" suggested in part by "existing literary scholarship" (11), processed their long-nineteenth-century corpus of novels (with the aid of a database designed by Jockers that tabulated the number of occurrences of each word [Heuser and Le-Khac 6]) to find other words that were statistically correlated with the seed words and whose frequency trends, measured longitudinally across the century in decade intervals, closely followed the frequency trends of the seed words. In other words, *Correlator* finds what Heuser and Le-Khac call "word cohorts" in the corpus, consisting of words that kept company with one another and behaved similarly over time, waxing or waning in frequency together and standing out from other companies of words. The final result—which I jump to while skipping the details of Heuser and Le-Khac's algorithmic method as well as, temporarily, an important adjustment step in their method—is the identification in the word cohorts of "rich, consistent semantic fields" that are "both semantically and culturally legible" in historical trends. An example is the 136 words such as *gentle*, *sensible*, *vanity*, *elegant*, *delicacy*, *reserve*, *mild*, and *restraint* that they label the "social restraint field" in the novels (8).

Using this method, Heuser and Le-Khac made two principal discoveries. First, they used the seed words *integrity*, *modesty*, *sensibility*, and *reason* (suited to scholarship on novels of the period) to find a strikingly large cohort of "abstract, socially normative, evaluative, and highly polarized words" whose frequencies declined dramatically over the century. This cohort they subcategorized into semantic fields labeled "social restraint,"

"moral valuation," "sentiment," and "partiality" (11–19). Then, serendipitously (instead of under the sway of preexisting scholarship), they fed the unlikely seed word *hard* into *Correlator* to discover a strikingly distinct, very large cohort of "concrete description words of a direct, everyday kind" whose frequencies rose dramatically over time. This cohort they subcategorized into semantic fields for action verbs, body parts, colors, numbers, locational and directional adjectives and prepositions, and physical adjectives (19–27). The strongly inverse correlation between these two large and differentiated word cohorts, which they further statistically corroborated (28–29), started them on the path of interpretation. The "abstract" cohort, they concluded, consists of words whose usage, while unanchored in specifics, was "monitored and tightly constrained" by the traditional smaller, rural communities represented more or less earlier in the century in evangelical, gothic, and village novels and the novels of Jane Austen, Walter Scott, and George Eliot (Eliot is a chronological outlier), while the "hard" cohort is populated by words whose stand-alone referentiality and alienation from larger contexts correlated later in the century with the "wider, less constrained social spaces" of the urban centers represented in city, industrial, adventure, fantasy, science fiction, and children's novels (30–34).

This insight finally led Heuser and Le-Khac at the highest level of interpretation to follow Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society* and *The Country and the City* in suggesting that the inverse "abstract" and "hard" trends reveal something significant about the "social space of the novel." They argue that the "values of conduct and social norms" in "knowable communities" (a phrase from Williams) declined in the face of "urbanization, industrialization, and new stages of capitalism" (33, 35–36). The computational verification of this previously known thesis, coupled with the discovery of precise word cohorts

giving genuinely fresh insight into the thesis, enables them in later sections of their pamphlet to offer more recognizably normative literary and cultural criticism, touching on action, setting, and character (37–45). Here they closely read texts (including, for the first time, block quotations), match aggregate trends to “units understandable and familiar to us as readers and literary scholars[:] the actual novels, genres, and authors” (31), and generalize about sweeping changes in cultural history, but with the important distinction that their reading is based not on the usual anecdotal, faux-empirical, or unique-case observations of literary criticism (e.g., noticing that a word appears “often” or in an “important” location) but on lines of interpretation generated by machine observation.

Here we reach the crux of the meaning problem in the digital humanities. While Heuser and Le-Khac mix “supervised and unsupervised procedures” (28), the newest, boldest, and most interesting part of their methodology is unsupervised. They help advance an important, general digital humanities goal that might be called *tabula rasa* interpretation—the initiation of interpretation through the hypothesis-free discovery of phenomena. Also shared by such digital humanities methods as topic modeling (a mathematics-based way to discern differentiated clusters of words that Heuser and Le-Khac use to corroborate their findings), the ideal in its purest form is what Heuser and Le-Khac call “an unsupervised method that generates topics without subjective input from users” (28).<sup>11</sup> That is, a computer should be able to read texts algorithmically and discover word cohorts or clusters leading to themes without acting on an initial concept from an interpreter looking to confirm a particular theme. Of course, Heuser and Le-Khac assume that there *are* preexisting themes to be found in the word cohorts of primary materials and also that the main mission is to discover them. But *tabula rasa*

interpretation is equally a goal of the more postmodern side of the digital humanities, which argues that critics should use algorithmic methods to play with texts experimentally, generatively, or “deformatively” to discover alternative ways of meaning that are not so much true to preexisting signals as riffs on those signals. The common goal is to banish, or at least crucially delay, human ideation at the formative onset of interpretation.

However, *tabula rasa* interpretation puts in question Heuser and Le-Khac’s ultimate goal, which is to get from numbers to humanistic meaning (“qualitative arguments and insights about humanistic subjects—culture, literature, art, etc.”). It is not clear epistemologically, cognitively, or socially how human beings can take a signal discovered by machine and develop an interpretation leading to a humanly understandable concept unless that signal (in order to be recognized as a signal at all) contains a coeval conceptual origin that is knowable in principle because, at a minimum, the human interpreter *has* known its form or position (the slot or approximate locus in the semantic system where its meaning, or at least its membership in the system, is expected to come clear).<sup>12</sup> If the machine can discover word cohorts triggered by seed words, in other words, then what seed concepts—which is to say seed semantics (using “semantics,” for the moment, as overlapping with “concepts” in a manner consistent with Heuser and Le-Khac’s usage)—lurk in the background as a latent, classificatory form of relational semantic positions able to make word cohorts into “proto-semantic fields” (7)?

Thus the immense importance of the adjustment step in Heuser and Le-Khac’s method that I earlier elided. In fact, Heuser and Le-Khac used *Correlator* by itself to produce only initial word cohorts and not finished semantic fields because they realized that they needed to ensure that their cohorts had a semantic consistency that quantitative correlation alone could not offer. Some word cohorts discovered



by machine, for example, suggested only fuzzy semantic fields that seemed blurred by extraneous words or, inversely, to lack words that should have been there. In other words, word cohorts had to be filtered and filled out in ways that made sense. Heuser and Le-Khac thus realized that they needed not just seed words but seed semantic concepts suspended precisely in what I above called a classificatory form of relational semantic positions, endowing cohorts with a sense of what is and is not proximate in meaning.

In short, Heuser and Le-Khac needed a thesaurus, and not just any thesaurus but one offering a historical semantics matched to the longitudinal dimension of their word cohorts. After they had already begun using *Correlator*, they pulled a rabbit out of the hat. They turned to the remarkable *Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary* (2009; hereafter *HTOED*), which had just been published, and borrowed its historical semantic classifications through what they call “a dialogic method that drew on both quantitative historical data and qualitative semantic rubrics to construct semantic fields with precision and nuance”:

Having moved through an empirically and historically focused stage of semantic field development, we needed to return to the semantic focus in order to make such purely empirical word cohorts interpretable and meaningful. Our initial approach was to filter through these words for groups that seemed semantically coherent, but this proved too loose and subjective. . . . Finally we turned to the [HT]OED. . . . It's nearly exhaustive, its categories are nuanced and specific, and it's truly organized around meaning. We used this powerful taxonomy to do two things: first, be more specific in identifying the semantic categories that constituted our word cohorts; second, to expand these word cohorts with many more words. (7)<sup>13</sup>

Created at the University of Glasgow beginning in 1965, the *HTOED* taxonomizes the English language into three master semantic

concepts, “the external world,” “the mind,” and “society,” and then, descending its classificatory tree by stages, into myriad ramifications. On the lower branches of the taxonomy, synonyms appear in the chronological order in which they entered the language.<sup>14</sup> At first glance, therefore, the *HTOED* is the perfect concept-hunting guide for Heuser and Le-Khac's word-cohort-hunting machine. This seems even more apparent when we realize just how human-powered the semantic interpretation involved in making the *HTOED* was. As documented in reports by Christian Kay and Irené Wotherspoon, among its chief editors, and in a detailed e-mail to me from the current *HTOED* associate director, Marc Alexander, the editors' sorting of words by meaning and chronology recapitulated the famous use of paper slips in the compilation of the *OED* itself.<sup>15</sup> Started before humanities computing was practical, the *HTOED* required human beings over decades to write down individual words from the *OED* on paper slips with meanings, usage dates, and sparse metadata, then to sort, bundle, and file the slips in conceptual groupings and hierarchies. When computation entered the picture, it did so originally in a secondary capacity (to drive the print run of the work). In its formative state, the *HTOED* was a human labor of semantic ordering.

By installing the *HTOED* as what amounts to a plug-in for *Correlator*, Heuser and Le-Khac sowed their hermeneutical process with a coseed of human semantic interpretation. They thus “solved” the meaning problem only by deftly turning the aporia between tabula rasa quantitative interpretation and humanly meaningful qualitative interpretation into its own apparent solution: a “dialogic approach that oscillates between the historical and the semantic, between empirical word frequencies that reveal the historical trends of words and semantic taxonomies that help us identify the meaning and content of those trends” (9). They add, “Strictly

speaking, the methods developed here are not looking at word cohorts, which have historical consistency but may lack semantic coherence, or semantic fields, which have semantic coherence but may have an ahistorical relationship. The real object of study is a hybrid one that satisfies both requirements" (9–10). Such hybridity is a prevalent feature of digital humanities method.<sup>16</sup>

How might such hybrid method be better grounded theoretically? I return to my earlier differentiation of the digital humanities from neighboring fields. Two of the deficiencies in the digital humanities revealed by that ethnographic map of fields are relevant.

One is design theory and practice, which Anne Burdick, Johanna Drucker, Peter Lunenfeld, Todd Presner, and Jeffrey Schnapp in their recent *Digital\_Humanities* declare with manifesto-like boldness to be central to the field (esp. 12–16, 117–19). Currently, it seems to me, the union between the digital humanities and new-media-studies communities that would be needed for full realization of this vision is more a goal than a reality, existing in specific projects and not programmatically. But the book's coauthors, expressing a West Coast view of the digital humanities rooted in media and design arts, are right to aim for design as a principle of knowledge discovery and generation rather than (more typical in the digital humanities) as an after-the-fact rendering of data in scatter plots, social-network graphs, and other stale visualizations or, equally tired, book-like or blog-like publication interfaces. As the coauthors put it, when "used to pose and frame questions about knowledge," design is "an intellectual method," an "embodiment of a project's argument and methodology," "an act of thinking," and a "new foundation for the conceptualization and production of knowledge" (13, 14, 15, 117). Interactive, multimodal, dynamic, and participatory design in the digital age is a method not just of pattern recognition but of pattern *understand-*

*ing*. Seeing design in data is a method for knowing meaning in the digital humanities.

The other deficiency I refer to is science and technology studies (STS), which digital humanists often occlude even as they speak of "digital technology," "media technology," and so on, as if technology were an indivisible part of the digital and media without its own history, philosophy, sociology, politics, economy, and aesthetics all tangled up with, yet also distinct from, science. I invoke especially the postmodern branch of STS (e.g., Feyerabend; Latour; Pickering), whose "against method" view of science (especially in its weird relations with technology) is that any quest for stable method in understanding how knowledge is generated by human beings using machines founders on the initial fallacy that there are immaculately separate human and machinic orders, each with an ontological, epistemological, and pragmatic purity that allows it to be brought into a knowable methodological relation with the other—whether a relation of master and slave, cause and effect, agent and instrument, or another. What could we learn from STS if we took the Stanford Literary Lab and other digital humanities centers and programs at their word and studied them as labs, much as Andrew Pickering studied the "hunting of the quark" in a physics lab (68–112)? The answer is likely that digital humanities method—converging with, but also sometimes diverging from, scientific method—consists in repeatedly coadjusting human concepts and machine technologies until (as in Pickering's thesis about "the mangle of practice") the two stabilize each other in temporary postures of truth that neither by itself could sustain. Knowledge is an ice-skater's dance on a slippery epistemic surface, on which neither the human nor the machine—the dancer nor the skates—alone can stand. STS, in other words, is another method for knowing meaning in the digital humanities. In fact, it can be thought of as complementing the method



of design. The difference between a mangle of practice and a dance, after all, is design.

Indeed, an STS approach opens a fascinating chapter in our reading of Heuser and Le-Khac's work that I can only briefly relate.<sup>17</sup> While I have not conducted STS-style ethnographic and documentary research on the Stanford Literary Lab (except through informal observations during a daylong visit at the invitation of the lab),<sup>18</sup> I have looked from a distance into the "lab" of the making of the *HTOED*—that is, the human-semantics lab that Heuser and Le-Khac position as the partner to their computational-analysis lab. When we view the *HTOED* in this way, we realize that Heuser and Le-Khac pulled not just any rabbit out of a hat but a special rabbit much like the one that led Alice down the rabbit hole. The *HTOED* is less a solution to the meaning problem than a recursive, looking-glass version of the very same problem. At least five aspects of its making are relevant in this regard:

1. While the creation of the *HTOED* was essentially precomputational, it was not pretechnological. Requiring human beings to write words, meanings, and meta-data on paper slips and then to sort the slips in drawers (and later in databases), the *HTOED* originated as a thoroughly entangled human-technological, rather than simply human, semantic act.
2. Following Heuser and Le-Khac, I have so far treated "semantics" and "concepts" as coincident. But in reflecting on the *HTOED*'s method, Kay separates out lexical semantics (meaning relations among words) and conceptual semantics (meanings linked to external-world referents). A focus on the former, she says, was "essentially the procedure adopted in *HTOED*, and is what we mean by saying that the classification should 'emerge' from the data," meaning the purely lexical data in their source text, the *OED* ("Classification" 265–66).
3. The phrase "'emerge' from the data" is the cue for an important tenet of the *HTOED*. As Kay argues, "Our theoretical position on

*HTOED* has always been that the classification at whatever level should develop from the data rather than be imposed upon it using some predetermined schema" ("Classification" 258). The underlying authority of the *HTOED*, it turns out, is "data" (the record of the English language observed through the instrument of the *OED*). That is, the *HTOED* itself adhered to the principle of the tabula rasa discovery of phenomena and initiation of interpretation (in this case, taxonomic interpretation).

4. It was thus after surveying their lexical data that the *HTOED* editors contravened the ordering scheme of their canonical predecessor, *Roget's Thesaurus*, which had put "abstract relations" first. The *HTOED* puts the "external world" first in its tri-nary taxonomic structure. That's because concrete and near-to-hand word senses relating to the external world entered the language earlier (Kay, "Classification" 257–62). The implications for our reading of Heuser and Le-Khac are startling. The long historical trend identified by the *HTOED*, in which concrete words precede abstract ones, is the reverse of the long-nineteenth-century novelistic trend that Heuser and Le-Khac identify, in which "abstract" words dominate earlier and "hard" words later. Of course, this by no means contradicts their thesis, since in more fully stated form their argument may well be that, because of urbanization, the nineteenth century (and the novel form) was exceptional, or at least matched the trend of only a few other centuries (and forms) in history. But a commitment to reading nineteenth-century novels in conjunction with the *HTOED*'s larger corpus would require further testing to see how exceptional the nineteenth-century trend really was and thus whether additional sociocultural or other phenomena must be factored in to explain its specificity.<sup>19</sup>
5. Finally, as a grace note, I add that while computation was an afterthought in making the *HTOED*, today it is crucial for advanced uses of the work. The *HTOED*

editors eventually migrated their content into a succession of relational databases because they realized that computation might support advanced, real-time querying (Wotherspoon, “Historical Thesaurus” 218). Even more dramatically, a recent essay by Alexander shows that querying the *HTOED* for insight into the history of the language can itself be a form of the digital humanities (“Various Forms”). Alexander conducts quantitative computational analysis of the *HTOED* to generate visualizations leading to hypotheses about language changes (see the figure below). Connecting the STS and design approaches I outlined earlier, we might even say that at this point using the *HTOED* becomes an experiment in digital design. In the end, the *HTOED* is not the “other” that Heuser and Le-Khac need to help make the work of their *Correlator* meaningful; it is the precursor of *Correlator*.

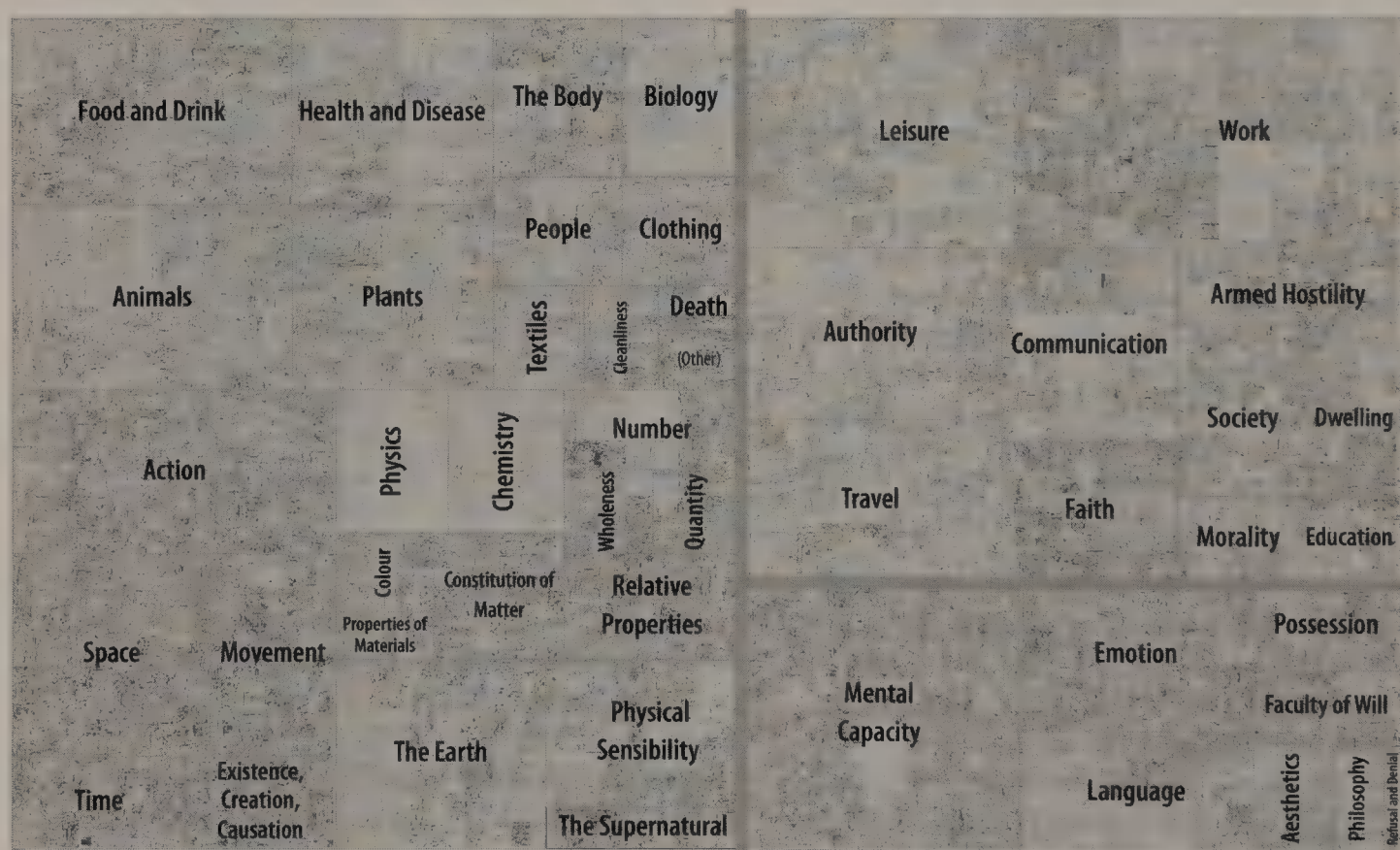
Marc Alexander’s tree-map visualization of present-day English in the *HTOED*. Each dot represents a word, and the shade of the dot corresponds to when the word entered the language (darker dots show earlier words). Words are arranged by semantic proximity as indicated in the labels.

But going down a rabbit hole, while necessary in pursuing any case of the digital humanities to its methodological foundation, is

not how we must conclude. I thus climb out of the specific purview of my example, and even of the digital humanities field, to open my argument to its most general extent. Ap-  
ropos is the following insight from N. Katherine Hayles:

The further one goes along the spectrum that ends with “machine reading,” the more one implicitly accepts the belief that large-scale multicausal events are caused by confluences that include a multitude of forces interacting simultaneously, many of which are nonhuman. . . . If events occur at a magnitude far exceeding individual actors and far surpassing the ability of humans to absorb the relevant information, however, “machine reading” might be a first pass toward making visible patterns that human reading could then interpret. (29)

It is not accidental, I can now reveal, that at the beginning of this essay I alluded to Lévi-Strauss and structural anthropology. Structuralism is a midpoint on the long modern path toward understanding the world as system





(e.g., as modes of production; Weberian bureaucracy; Saussurean language; mass, media, and corporate society; neoliberalism; and so on) that has forced the progressive side of the humanities to split off from earlier humanities of the human spirit (*Geist*) and human self to adopt a worldview in which, as Hayles says, “large-scale multicausal events are caused by confluences that include a multitude of forces . . . many of which are nonhuman.” This is the backdrop against which we can see how the meaning problem in the digital humanities registers today’s general crisis of the meaningfulness of the humanities. The general crisis is that humanistic meaning, with its residual yearnings for spirit, humanity, and self—or, as we now say, identity and subjectivity—must compete in the world system with social, economic, science-engineering, workplace, and popular-culture knowledges that do not necessarily value meaning or, even more threatening, value meaning but frame it systemically in ways that alienate or co-opt humanistic meaning. Humanistic knowledge today is thus increasingly assimilated to what humanists themselves call research, evidence, analysis, method, productivity, and “impact” (as this term is institutionalized in “research assessment exercises” in British universities), with no unfilled time and space left for any old ghosts in the machine—unless, as I have argued in *Laws of Cool*, there remains a yearning, nowhere keener than among our students, caught in the educational mangle, to be cool. Cool people say nix to today’s knowledge-work system even as they walk into the cubicles.

Of course, if this were only a problem of research methodology, then I would be extravagant to call it a “crisis” in the meaningfulness of the humanities. But “crisis” is appropriate when we realize that the meaning problem also affects pedagogy and jobs in the wake of economic recession, which brings the problem cruelly to bear on individual humanists in training or seeking jobs (not to mention on the humanities programs that nurture and employ

them). Here opens a set of topics that I cannot deal with in present limits but that more fully demonstrate how the digital humanities register the larger issues of the humanities.

One topic is the way digital pedagogy—as witnessed in current controversies over massive open online courses (MOOCs), all-digital “campuses” in public universities, and so on—registers the possibility of gigantic changes in the aims, practices, audiences, infrastructure, and staff of humanities teaching. The bluff is now called on decades of defensively legitimating the humanities as thinking and language “skills” added on top of traditionally meaningful humanistic knowledge. If the humanities fit that mold in part, then maybe—some administrators and legislators think—they should fit it entirely so that their content can be “delivered” modularly through the Internet in the manner of the MOOCs or Khan Academy courses in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics that have made the biggest public impression.

Another topic is the job market for digital humanists, especially in regard to tenurable faculty lines versus “alt-ac” (alternative academic career) adjunct, staff, support, and cultural-institution positions. The turmoil and uncertainty in the nature of digital humanities jobs register the larger uncertainty of employment in the humanities as “meaningful” jobs transition away from tenure and toward a corporatized ideal of reconfigurable and replaceable professional-managerial knowledge workers perpetually threatened with restructuring layoffs in favor of even more exploited “permatemp” and outsourced labor.

In all these ways, the digital humanities register the crisis of the humanities. For that reason, I and others started the *4Humanities* advocacy initiative, “powered by the digital humanities community,” so that the digital humanities can try to advocate for the humanities and not just register their crisis. I do not know how much difference that initiative and others like it will make in the

meaningfulness of the humanities to the world. But I do know that such an effort—dedicating the digital humanities to the soul of the humanities—is what is meaningful for a humanist, digital or otherwise, now.<sup>20</sup>

## NOTES

1. Among recent surveys and overviews of the digital humanities are Svensson's articles; Hayles; Kirschenbaum, "Digital Humanities" and "What Is Digital Humanities"; Liu, "State" and "Where Is Cultural Criticism"; Burdick, Drucker, Lunenfeld, Presner, and Schnapp; and "Digital Humanities Manifesto 2.0." Recent or forthcoming essay collections about the digital humanities include Schreibman, Siemens, and Unsworth; Gold; Price and Siemens; and Goldberg and Svensson. On whether the digital humanities are a field and on the linguistic usage of the phrase *digital humanities*, see Liu, "Is Digital Humanities a Field?"

2. These expressions in recent conferences, blogs, tweets, discussion threads, papers, etc., have become important "memes" shaping the digital humanities community. On the issues of theory, building, and hack versus yack, see also Cecire, "Introduction."

3. Since the question of who is included in the digital humanities can be a sensitive one, I should clarify my understanding of the scope of the field. While I focus in this essay on digital literary studies and one concrete research example, the digital humanities are much broader. I thus take care to relate my example to shared methods and problems across the field (including, e.g., digital history). However, while my goal is to address a fairly broad notion of the digital humanities as they are commonly practiced and discussed, I do not try to make the tent so big—by, for instance, covering what should or could be part of it but so far is not commonly recognized to be so (e.g., the design field)—that the term *digital humanities* becomes formless or aspirational.

Also, I do not specifically discuss digital work in such near humanities as the branches of the social sciences, archaeology, and anthropology that have joined the humanities in the so-called linguistic and cultural turns and related trends. Whether such work is considered digital humanities depends on the prior issue of whether, digital methods aside, it is humanistic (fitting, e.g., the loose definition in the 1965 National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act: "those aspects of social sciences which have humanistic content and employ humanistic methods" [National Endowment 1]).

Caveats also apply to my generalizations about new media studies and to the gross simplification here

(given nuance below) by which I separate them from the digital humanities.

For helping me think about these inclusion issues, I am grateful to members of the audiences at talks where I delivered versions of this essay who pointed out that they do not entirely recognize their field or work in my description of the digital humanities. Ultimately, of course, the "who is in the digital humanities?" issue will be adjusted on the ground through normal professional processes of adjudication—where one gets a job or places one's students, where one publishes in print or online, which forums or blogs one posts on, which *Twitter* hashtags one is associated with, which conferences one goes to, which grants one gets, etc.

4. On algorithmic criticism, see Ramsay's essay by that title.

5. On #transformDH, see Phillips. The collective now appears through its hashtag on *Twitter*, has a *Tumblr* page, and is a HASTAC group.

6. Examples of the textual-editing, bibliography-as-sociology-of-texts, and materiality-of-the-digital approaches in the digital humanities include, respectively, McGann, *Radiant Textuality*; the Text Encoding Initiative's *TEI: P5 Guidelines*, with its attention to prosopography and social relations ("Names, Dates, People, and Places"); and Kirschenbaum, *Mechanisms*.

7. Examples of the historical sociology I refer to include Franzosi; Bearman and Stovel; and Mohr and Duquenne. An example of social-network analysis in digital literary studies is Moretti, *Network Theory*. (On such analysis in general, see my "From Reading.") An example of social-network analysis in digital history is Lemerrier and Rosental. (For other historians using the methods and tools of social-network analysis, see "Bibliography.")

8. See also Heuser and Le-Khac's "Learning to Read Data," which summarizes the research reported in their pamphlet.

9. For a discussion of "saving the phenomena" that bears centrally on the issue of data, see Bogen and Woodward.

10. The full list of the novels in Heuser and Le-Khac's corpus can be found in their "Online Companion." Information on the source of the digitized texts is from an e-mail from Heuser to the author.

11. Goldstone and Underwood offer an explanation and example of topic modeling of special interest to readers of *PMLA*. Separately, Underwood more fully explains the methodology. For a succinct discussion of the difference between supervised and unsupervised data mining—a distinction originating in the field of machine learning—see "Analytics."

12. Sculley and Pasanek consider the problem of "circularity" (and other issues) in humanities data mining.

13. For a fuller description of the way Heuser and Le-Khac used the *HTOED*, see appendix C in their *Quantitative Literary History*.

14. For this essay, I have consulted the online *HTOED*, which now appears as part of the online *OED*. On the



HTOED's classification system, see "Structure of the *Historical Thesaurus*." For additional general information about the work, see Kay, "What Is the *Historical Thesaurus*."

15. For information about the making of the HTOED referred to below, I have consulted Kay, "Classification" and "What Is the *Historical Thesaurus*"; Kay and Chase; and Wotherspoon, "Historical Thesaurus" and "Making"; as well as Alexander's e-mail. For photos of the paper slips, filing drawers, and computers used, see *Historical Thesaurus Photo Gallery*. My special thanks to Alexander for helping me gather resources and for his e-mail filled with details and reflections on the manual and technological processes used in making the HTOED.

16. See, e.g., Gibbs and Cohen's discussion of their hybrid method (70, 76).

17. I abbreviate here a longer discussion of the HTOED to be included in a version of this essay for my book in progress on the digital humanities. My thanks to Clare Birchall, who, in a conversation with me after I presented an early version of this essay at King's College, asked a question that made me start looking into the technological dimensions of the HTOED.

18. My thanks to the Stanford Literary Lab for inviting me to visit on 21 May 2012. On the genesis and principles of the lab, see Jockers.

19. In their statistical analysis of diction in English literary works over a longer period (the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), Underwood and Sellers make a related point when comparing their findings with Heuser and Le-Khac's. They track a rise in the nineteenth century in the proportional incidence of earlier-vintage, often Anglo-Saxon words in literary genres (including prose fiction) that is "largely consubstantial" with the rising incidence of "hard" words in novels of that century found by Heuser and Le-Khac. However, they add that their longer historical baseline shows that the trajectory of such words "had recently reversed direction" as part of a new way of being "literary." "The relative scarcity of simple action verbs in early-nineteenth-century writing, for instance," they note, "was a recent development" in literary language that reveals social transformations only through the mediation of "competing ideals of literary refinement." My thanks to Le-Khac for his e-mail calling my attention to Underwood and Sellers's article, which I had not seen.

20. Advocating for the humanities does not necessarily only mean defending older or disciplinary notions of the humanities. My "Humanities and Tomorrow's Discoveries" attempts to reframe the humanities in common cause with other disciplines and with public needs.

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## criticism in translation

## The Ordinary Gloss on Jonah

INTRODUCTION AND  
TRANSLATION BY RYAN  
McDERMOTT

RYAN McDERMOTT, assistant professor of English at the University of Pittsburgh, is completing a book project titled "Words into Works: Literary Ethics and Tropological Invention in England, c. 1350–1600." His article in *Modern Theology*, "Henri de Lubac's Genealogy of Modern Exegesis and Nicholas of Lyra's Literal Sense of Scripture" (Jan. 2013), which deals with medieval commentaries on Jonah, articulates the rationale for a second book project, "The Drama of Vernacular Theology: The Bible, Literature, and Genealogies of Modernity."

### Introduction

THE ORDINARY GLOSS WAS THE MOST WIDELY USED EDITION OF THE BIBLE IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES AND WELL INTO THE SIXTEENTH

century. Medievalists know the commentary element as the Gloss to which theologians as diverse as Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, John Wyclif, and Martin Luther habitually referred. As the foremost vehicle for medieval exegesis, the Gloss framed biblical narratives for a wide range of vernacular religious literature, from Dante's *Divine Comedy* to French drama to a Middle English retelling of the Jonah story, *Patience*.

A wider audience might be most familiar with the Gloss's distinctive page layout, its large-point biblical text nestling up against slabs of commentary on either side—the "outer gloss"—and bristling between the lines with forerunners to the footnote, the "interlinear gloss." This intricate and surprisingly user-friendly format gathered onto one page the best historical, textual, natural-philosophical, and theological resources available, distilled by "masters of the sacred page" such as the likely glossator of Jonah, Gilbert the Universal, so called for his command of all knowledge (Andrée 37–40). Its layout provided quick, synoptic access to multiple traditions and styles of exegesis and guided five centuries of students into, around, and beyond the sacred page. Even the most successful early English Protestant Bible, the Geneva Bible, owed its layout and note structure, if not its theological apparatus, to the page-design innovations that the Gloss had introduced (Tribble 31–36). In its manifold incarnations, the Gloss harnessed advanced design and codicological technologies to shape scripture's reception and empower readers to navigate a text that divagates and diversifies just as much as it witnesses to its own unity.<sup>1</sup>

The backbone of the Gloss is Jerome's fourth-century Latin translation of the Bible, known in the medieval church as the Vulgate. A community of scholars gathered around Anselm of Laon compiled the glosses on the Vulgate from patristic authorities around 1100; the text was well established by 1140, and by 1200 the Gloss had become "the most commonly available type of late-twelfth-century text," with at least some parts of it in practically every European scholastic library and in many monasteries (Smith, *Glossa Ordinaria* 180).<sup>2</sup> The Gloss on Jonah relies almost exclusively on Jerome's commentary on

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Jonah (c. 396), so its Latin often has a tone of urbane classicism. But the Gloss also chops up, compresses, and rearranges Jerome with scholastic delight and directness that render the Latin authentically medieval. I have tried in my translation to register this range of formal rhetoric and blunt immediacy.

The base text for my translation of the commentary comes from a midpoint in the Gloss's production history, just as it made the leap to print, but before the printed editions permanently accrued additional layers of commentary by Nicholas of Lyra and others in subsequent centuries.<sup>3</sup> When Adolf Rusch produced the first printed edition, in 1480–81, at Strassburg, he pushed the limits of possibility for the complexity of the printed page, employing an elaborate system of tie-marks to use all the space on the page (Froehlich and Gibson).

These innovations change the way we read, literally distancing commentary from base text. The text's material disposition influences what the rhetorical traditions call readers' *ductus*—their movement through a text, simultaneously affective and spatial, and the maneuvers of thought the text invites them to perform (Carruthers 77–81). (I have attempted to emulate the patterns of Rusch's edition here, though my choices are influenced in part by the limitations of a PMLA page.)

In the Gloss on Jonah, literal-historical exegesis and allegorical exegesis interanimate each other. Here we are light-years away from the mechanistic "levels" of scripture many literary scholars once imagined as fourfold exegesis. Instead of a schematic semiosis where the literal sense equals X and the allegorical sense equals Y, the Gloss sets historical and allegorical reading in a productive oscillation embodied in the movements of the reader's eyes as they navigate from column to column, gloss to gloss.

For example, the outer glosses on the first word, "And," explain both the source of the author's invention and the odd stylistic quirk of beginning with a conjunction. They attribute this oddity to spiritual inspiration, while the interlinear gloss on "saying" suggests the Trinitarian context in which spiritual inspiration might take place. Like modern-day form critics in biblical studies,

the glossator determines the context of composition, its *Sitz im Leben*—in this case, a prophetic ecstasy—to explicate the passage's form and style and find clues about its purpose.

Inner and outer glosses interact with the biblical text in such a way that none of the three parts can convey its full meaning on its own. This all adds up to a dizzyingly complex theological and critical thought machine that depends on the physical layout of the page to lead readers from center to periphery, from main text to commentary, and back again.

Jesus himself commented allegorically on Jonah (Matt. 12.41), rendering the book a touchstone for Catholic and Protestant allegorical theory. The Gloss on Jonah can thus serve as an excellent undergraduate or graduate course text for discussions of premodern biblical exegesis, medieval Jewish-Christian relations, book history, and, in combination with works such as *Patience* and *Moby-Dick*, the Bible as literature.

## NOTES

I initially worked through many parts of this translation with the University of Virginia's Medieval Latin Reading Group. For their enthusiastic collaboration, I thank Chris Hackett, Gabriel Haley, Petra Turner Harvey, David Hewett, Patrick Leitch, and Rebecca Rine. Andrew Beer was my chief collaborator on the first draft. I thank him, Andrew Galloway, and Bruce Venarde for help with conundrums, though any error or infelicity in this final draft is entirely my own.

1. An excellent guide to these developments may be found in Christopher de Hamel's *Glossed Books of the Bible and the Origins of the Paris Booktrade*, a book as intelligently and handsomely designed as its subjects.

2. Beryl Smalley's groundbreaking *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* remains a touchstone for historical research on the Gloss. Lesley Smith's *The Glossa Ordinaria: The Making of a Medieval Bible Commentary* expertly consolidates subsequent research.

3. While the past decade has yielded the first critical edition of a book of the Gloss (Dove, *Glossa ordinaria: In Canticum canticorum*) and translations of a few other books (Andrée; Dove, *The Glossa Ordinaria on the Song of Songs*; Woodward), only one has attempted to transmit the distinctive Gloss formatting (Smith, *Medieval Exegesis*).

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## The Ordinary Gloss on Jonah

¶The prologue for the prophet Jonah begins

The Hebrews say that Saint Jonah was the son of the widowed woman Sareptana [of Zarephath], whom the prophet Elijah raised from the dead. Afterward Jonah's mother said to Elijah, *Now I know that you are a man of God and the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth* [1 Kings 17.24]. For this reason they call this boy Amathi, for Amathi means "truth" in our language. And because Elijah spoke a true thing, the one who was raised is said to be the son of truth. Therefore, a dove is born from truth because Jonah means "dove." Jonah, then, is sent to the nations for the condemnation of Israel because, while Nineveh pursued repentance, they [Israel] continued in wickedness. Indeed, 2 Kings shows that Jonah was a prophet in the time of Jeroboam, king of Israel,

who, having forsaken God, made sacrifice to idols with his people in Samaria. When by means of illuminating prophecy Jonah saw the sinners of the city of Nineveh about to obtain the mercy of God, he did not want to go to proclaim the destruction of Nineveh because he did not want to seem to preach false things. For just as God said to Abraham concerning the wickedness of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, "*The cry of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah has reached me*" [Gen. 18.20–21], so also he says to Jonah concerning Nineveh that the cry of its wickedness has ascended to him. And because when God made his judgment concerning the people of Sodom, it was hardly revoked, so also Jonah, ignorant of the dispensation of God, who desires the salvation of men converting to him more than [their] destruction, did not want the judgment



¶Jonah the dove and the grieving son of Amathi who was from Gath which is in Ofir is sent to proclaim to the Gentiles. Having been sent, he scorns; scorning, he flees; fleeing, he sleeps. Because of him, the ship is imperiled. But the lot reveals him lying hidden. The whale devoured him after he had been cast out, and spewed him back as he was praying. Having been thrown back, he preached destruction. But he is saddened by the repentance of the city, and he begrudges the salvation of the Gentiles. He even enjoys a bower of green ivy, and he is pained by its sudden withering. His grave is pointed out in one of the cities of Gath, in a hamlet that is at the second milestone on the road to Sepphoris, on the road by which one goes to Tiberias.

¶No one is a better interpreter of a type of himself than he who inspired the prophets and guided them along certain lines, as it were, of the truth that would

come to be among his own servants—who spoke to the Jews who did not know Christ the son of God. *“The men of Nineveh will rise on Judgment Day with this generation and condemn it because they did penance at the preaching of Jonah. And behold one greater than Jonah is here”* [Matt. 12.41]. The carnal Jew is condemned by the believing world and perishes, unbelieving, even as Nineveh is doing penance.

¶And: To those things that were being revolved in the mind of the prophet by the Spirit is joined this conjunction—namely, *and*.

that had been announced against Nineveh to be revoked. What happened to Jonah also had happened to Saint Elisha, who did not recognize the son of the Sumanite woman as dead [2 Kings 4]. So Jonah, having suffered something human, thought that he would flee from the sight of God, saying with David, *“Where shall I go away from your spirit, and where shall I flee from your face?”* [Ps. 138.7].

¶The argument begins

Jonah the beautiful dove, prefiguring the passion of the Lord by his shipwreck, calls the world back to repentance, and he announces salvation for the Gentiles under the name of “Nineveh.”

## Chapter 1

And the word of the Lord was

† Christ, over whom the Spirit in the appearance of a dove [appeared], who also is suffering on our behalf.

‡ Of truth; God is truth.

§ The Father to the Son.

made to Jonah† the son of ‡Amathi, saying§  
2 “Arise and go into Nineveh, the great city,

¶And the word of the Lord was made: Seeing many things in the Spirit, as is the custom of a prophet, concerning these many things, he bursts forth into these words.

¶City: The world. So that the whole world might accept what the Jew despises. This [world] that God made as if a beautiful house so that he should be served by man, who, because he wandered away through pride, is called back to repentance.

¶Jonah, which means “dove,” is sent to Nineveh, which is said to be splendid. Thus Christ, full of the Holy Spirit, is sent to the world, which is called in the Greek tongue “cosmos”—that is, ornate and beautiful, because of the design of the Creator. Whence *God saw all the things that he had made, and they were very good* [Gen. 1.31]. Therefore the whole world praises him whom Israel despises so that

the humble man, having put down corrupting pride, might ascend into heaven by the Son of God descending.

¶Although Jonah, according to the interpretation, displays the figure of Christ himself, it is not necessary for us to strive to refer the whole sequence of the story to Christ by allegory, but only those things that are able to be understood clearly without the risk of interpretation. For just because the apostle says that in our first parents the sacrament of Christ and the Church is prefigured [Eph. 5.32], not all things that are

said about our first parents can be referred to this sacrament.

¶ **For their wickedness has risen up:** Similarly in Genesis: "*The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is multiplied*" [Gen.

18.20]. And to Cain: "*The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the earth*" [Gen. 4.10].

¶ **And Jonah rose up:** Because the Spirit revealed it to him, the prophet knew that the repentance of the nations was the fall of the Jews, and so the lover of his homeland does not so much begrudge Nineveh as he desires that his people not perish. For he knew from the prayer of Moses [Deut. 33] that the Lord had in mind the liberation of the Israelites. He saw also that God sent the prophets to the Jews in order to provoke them

to repentance and that prophetic Balaam had prophesied about the salvation of the Jews. It pains him that he alone was chosen to be sent to the city of enemies, where there is the worship of idols and contempt for God. He also knew that whenever the Gentiles believed, Judea would be blinded. He feared that once the Gentiles were converted by his preaching, the Jews would be completely abandoned in his own lifetime, and for this reason he fled.

¶ **Tharsis:** According to Josephus, [it] is the city of Cilicia; according to Chronicles, the place is in India. But the Hebrews believed that the sea generally is called Tharsis. Whence *With a vehement breath you will pound to pieces the ships of Tharsis* [Ps. 47.8]—that is, the sea. It is more fitting for a fearful, fugitive man that he does not choose a

and preach in it, for their wickedness has

† Thinking that he could avoid the wrath of God in another place if he should leave behind Judea, in which alone he thought God was known, and in this act he imitated Cain. risen up before me." 3 †And Jonah rose

up to flee from the face of the Lord into

† According to the lay of the land.

‡ The port of Judea, in which to this day the rocks are pointed out on which Andromeda, tied up, was freed by the help of Perseus.

Tharsis, †and he descended into ‡Joppa, and found a ship going into Tharsis, and

† That is, the price of passage.

‡ Like a fugitive anxiously seeking hiding places.

paid them the †fare, ‡and descended into it to go with them to Tharsis away from

† Nothing is safe if God is against it.

the face of the Lord. 4 †But the Lord sent a great wind upon the sea, and a great

† When just before everything had been calm.

tempest was made† on the sea, and the

† ¶Jonah was being shaken to repentance. ¶Because it had taken on board somebody who endangered it.

ship †was in danger of being pounded to pieces. 5 And the sailors were afraid,

specific place for his flight, but is content to be carried away wherever the sea takes him. Or according to the interpretation in which Tharsis is said to be the contemplation of joy, the prophet

hurries to go to the joy of rest, wanting more to hand himself over completely to contemplation and perfectly to enjoy beauty and the variety of knowledge that is signified by Joppa, which is called beautiful, than that by the salvation of the Gentiles the people [of Israel] should perish, from which people Christ was about to be born, according to the flesh.

¶ Mystically, Christ, having assumed the flesh, in a certain way fleeing his homeland—that is, heaven—comes to Tharsis—that is, the sea of this world—in which he called out, "*My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me*" [Matt. 26.39],

for fear that, the people of the Jews having been damned, the multitude of the Gentiles would believe. And he loved that people [the Jews] so much, on account of his love for the patriarchs and the promise to Abraham, that on the cross he said, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*" [Luke 23.34]. For on account of this love, when he was on the farthest point of the shore (which was said to be most beautiful because it was in Judea), he does not want to take bread from the children and give it to the dogs. But because he had come to the sheep of Israel, he pays the fare to the ferrymen so that he who had come at first to save his own people might save the people who dwell near the sea and so that in the midst of storms—that is, his passion



and cries on the cross—[and] submerged in hell, he might save those whom he was neglecting, it would seem, by sleeping on a ship.

¶The human race may be signified by the flight of the prophet, when, scorning the commands of God, it withdrew from his face and handed itself over to the world, and later, with the shipwreck of the world raging against it, it is compelled to turn back to him whom it fled. And those things which it had thought sources of salvation for itself are turned into destruction. Not only does the help of men not benefit those to whom it is offered, but those who offer it are deftly smashed to pieces, just as we read about Egypt laid waste by the Assyrians, since Egypt was offering help to the Israelites against the will of God [Isa. 20].

¶**And the men cried out:** Not knowing the truth, the sailors do not know the providence of God, yet even under the error of religion, they know that something must be worshipped. Israel, on the contrary, perceives God neither in good things nor in bad things, and while Christ mourns for the people, Israel has dry eyes.

¶**And slept:** Even as the others were thrown into confusion, the prophet is described as care-free and tranquil, as one who thoroughly enjoys a peaceful sleep in the hold of the ship. Or it can be said that conscious of his flight and sin, while the others do not know the cause of the storm, he himself does not dare to see the waves surging up against him, and he sleeps not out of insouciance but out of melancholy, like the apostles in the Lord's passion.

¶The heavy sleep of the prophet signifies man languishing in the slumber of his going astray, for whom it does not suffice to flee from the face of God, but on top of that, overcome by a certain

madness, he ignores the wrath of God, and he sleeps without care, and his deep sleep resounds through raucous nostrils.

¶Tropologically: Many are those who, sailing with Jonah and having their own gods, hasten to go to the contemplation of joy, but after Jonah had been caught by lot, and by that man's death the storm of the world was calmed, and peace was restored on the sea, then the one God will be adored, and spiritual offerings will be sacrificed, which, according to the literal sense, they did not have in the midst of the waves.

† Thinking that the ship is weighed down by its customary freight, they do not know that the entire weight is that of the fugitive prophet.

and the men cried out to their god, †and they threw the wares that were in the ship

† So that it might leap more lightly across the waves, into the sea †to lighten it of them. And Jonah went down to the inner parts of the ship, and slept with a heavy slumber.

† It is natural that anyone, in his own danger, hopes for more from another than from himself.

‡ He who ought to have consoled others, being perturbed by so great a crisis.

6 †And the ‡captain came to him and said

† Foolishly he blamed him for his security.

to him, †“Why are you weighed down with sleep? †Arise! Call on your God (if by chance God will think of us) so that we might not perish. 7 And a man said to his fellow, “Come, and let us cast lots, and let us

† Against a common danger let there be a common prayer.

sleep? †Arise! Call on your God (if by chance God will think of us) so that we might not perish. 7 And a man said to his fellow, “Come, and let us cast lots, and let us

† That is, torment.

know why †this is upon us.” And they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 And

¶**And a man said to:** Those who have frequently experienced the nature of winds and of storms see that these waves do not rise up from usual causes. Because if it were [from usual causes], they would not be seeking the cause of the shipwreck by lot, nor would they desire to avoid a certain danger by means of an uncertain thing.

¶That Matthias is chosen by lot and that this fugitive is caught by lot is accomplished not by the power of a lot but by the power of God, who guided the uncertain lots. Therefore we should not because of this example trust in or use lots, because the rights and immunities of individuals cannot make common law. By the will of God Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar come to know future things by the interpretation of dreams; on

account of this, nevertheless, credence ought not to be given to dreams everywhere.

¶Tell us: With wondrous brevity his person, region, and city is asked, so that from these things the cause of the danger might be understood.

¶I am a Hebrew: He did not say, "I am a Jew," because the cutting of the ten tribes from the two imposed that name on the people. But he said "Hebrew" because that was a general name as much for the two tribes as for the ten.

¶When he had told [them] that he feared the Lord, he told [them] that he also had fled from the face of the Lord, and that he had not done his commands. Therefore, the men are afraid because they understand that he is a holy man and of a holy race, and that he who flees is a great man. But [they also understand] that he who is seeking him is greater. They do not dare to hand him over; they are not able to hide him.

¶Since he confesses the creator of the sea

and the dry land, why does he think that, leaving the land, he is able to avoid the creator of the sea in the sea?

¶And they said to him: In rebuke, as if [to say], "If you fear God, whom you declare is so powerful, how do you think that you are able to escape him?" Or, inquiring, wishing to know the reason for his flight, they say, "Why would

he, having left his own land, seek for safety on the sea?"

¶What should we do with you? They ask so that he who was the author of the sin might

be the remedy himself: "Just as you explained the cause of the disease, show also its cure. From the swelling of the sea we understand that the wrath of God is against us because we picked up the fugitive. But we will kill you so that we might ease this anger. But since you are a worshipper of this God, it is yours to order what is necessary for the deed, and it is ours to lay hands on you so that, with the anger of God turned away, the sea might desist."

¶And he said to them: Now that he has been caught, the fugitive does not conceal or deny his guilt, but having confessed it, he willingly accepts the punishment, preferring to perish alone because of his own sin, rather than that others should sin and perish with him. It is

also prepared, by the salvation and conversion of the sailors, that the great multitude of Nineveh can be saved by a similar confession.

¶Allegorically, these winds, these waves refer to Christ and to the Church in danger, or to the apostles when they awoke [Christ or when], deserting him in the passion, [they] are cast about in the waves. Therefore Christ says,

† What the lot showed, they force him to confess with his own voice.

they said to him, †"Tell us, on whose ac-

† What do you do for a living?

count is this evil? †What is your work?

† From which region or from whose city?

†What is your country, or of what people are you?" 9 And he said to them, "I am a

† Nomad, just as Abraham and the other patriarchs who were wanderers of this world.

‡ That is, "I worship him whom you do not know" or "I fear as a slave, even if I do not love as a son."

§ Not the gods whom you worship, but God, who made all things and is powerful in all things.

†Hebrew, and I ‡fear the §Lord, the God

† Onto which I flee.

of heaven, who made the †sea and the

† ¶From which I flee. ¶To distinguish it from the sea, he eloquently calls it not the land but the dry land.

†dry land." 10 And the men were greatly afraid, and they said to him, "Why have you done this?" (For the men knew that he fled from the face of the Lord—because he had told them.) 11 And they said,

† By this action.

"What should we do with you, and† the

† Behold the reason why they were asking this.

‡ Following the fugitive at the command of God.

sea will hold back from us?" †For the ‡sea

† While the sailors delay, [the sea] was getting harsher, showing that he cannot put off the Creator's vengeance. flowed and †swelled over them. 12 And he

† The tempest seeks me; destroy me so that by my death you might live.

said to them, †"Take me and cast me into



"Since the world sees that I sail with you to the contemplation of joy, just as you also will be where I am, therefore it roars and wants to devour me, so that it might kill you likewise, nor does it understand

that just as it seizes bait on a hook, so also it will die by my death." *Take me up and cast me into the sea.* "The storm that rages against you on account of me will be calmed when I die. It is not yours to arrest death, but to accept a death that has freely been brought on by another, except where love is endangered."

¶ **And the men rowed:** Although he had brought the judgment against himself, nevertheless they do not dare to lay a hand on the worshipper of God. For this reason, they labor to return to the land, preferring to die rather than to spill blood. However, they row because they think that without the sacrament of him who was about to suffer, the ship is able to be freed from danger,

although the submersion of Jonah is the re-lightening of the ship.

¶ **And they cried out:** They appeal to God that he not ascribe to them the guilt of what they are about to do. As if it were said, "We do not want to kill your prophet, but he himself confessed that you are angry and your storm reveals him; your will is fulfilled by our hands." What Pilate does and says is similar—Pilate who, washing

his hands, says, "*I am clear from the blood of this just man*" [Dan. 13.46, Matt. 27.24]. The Gentiles do not want Christ to perish; they testify to his innocence, and the Jews say, "*His blood be*

*upon us and upon our children*" [Matt. 27.25].

¶ **Because we took him on board,** because the sea rages, because he is revealed by lot, because he himself shows what ought to happen because of him, it is necessarily your will. Whence the Savior in the Psalm: "*Lord, I have desired that I should do your will*" [Ps. 39.9].

¶ **Before the passion of Christ,** errors and diverse teachings were tossing about the little ship of the Church and the whole human race like opposing waves, but after the passion there is the tranquility of faith, the peace of the world, all things secure. Thus after the headlong fall of Jonah, the sea desists from its fury.

¶ **And the men feared:** Before the passion, they were shouting to their

gods in fear; after the passion, they fear God by worshipping and honoring him, and they sacrifice offerings, which, according to the literal sense, they did not have among the waves, but [they did have] the sacrifice of an afflicted spirit, and they made an oath that they would not turn away from God anymore, discerning from the flight of the storm that the words of the prophet were true.

the sea, and the sea will hold back from

† I am not ignorant that the elements are stirred up for my punishment. Once I have endured the storm, you will receive peace.

you. † **For I know that this great tempest is**

† Who have received me.

upon † **you on my account.** 13 And the men rowed to return to the land, but they were not able because the sea ran and swelled over them. 14 And they cried out

† Knowing that the death of sin is worse than [the loss of mortal] life, out of great faith they pray for the soul of another even though their own bodies are in danger.

to the Lord, and said, † **"We beseech you, Lord, do not let us perish for the life of this righteous man, and do not place innocent blood on us; for you, Lord, have done just as you willed."** 15 And they

† They do not grab him, but they carry him with deference and honor.

‡ Christ.

§ Not fighting back, but stretching out his hands through the will of God.

† **took ‡Jonah, §and cast him into the**

† The sea, which is angry with Jonah absent, now apprehending what it desires, holds it, rejoices in it, and embraces it, and tranquility returns as a result of the joy. sea, and the † **sea stood back from its raging.** 16 And the men feared the Lord with

† With all the mind, with all the heart, with all the strength.

a great † **fear, and sacrificed victims to the Lord, and made vows.**

¶ **And the Lord prepared:** Either from the beginning when he was creating, or he made it [the whale] come alongside the ship so that it might catch him falling headlong, so that he might provide a dwelling instead of death, so that he who felt God angry on the ship might feel God favorably inclined in death.

¶ **And Jonah was:** Just as Jonah points to the passion through his being in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, so also his prayer is a type of Christ's prayer. ¶ **Whoever believes** that three young men were indeed freed from the furnace, so that the odor of the fire did not cling to their clothes [Dan. 3], should not doubt about Jonah's salvation in the belly of the whale.

¶ **Some say** [the count of three days and nights begins] on Friday during preparation for Passover, when with the sun setting from the sixth hour up to the ninth hour, the night has succeeded the day;

two nights and days then must be calculated up to the morning of the Sabbath, and with the Sabbath meal served on the following night, three days and nights are calculated. Some understand this as a synecdoche—that is, the whole from the part.

¶ **I cried out of my tribulation:** As I looked at the enormous beast, I remembered the open jaws of God—and “*I cried out*”: either with the cry finding a place among yielding waters, or with the emotion of the heart alone.

¶ **As much as it is clear** regarding Jonah that he has been trapped in a belly in the middle of the sea, the savior even more so, appearing in the flesh, fully knew life in the storms of this world,

which is called “the sea and the storm” by comparison to his heavenly lodging. Whence, *I am stuck in the mire of the deep and I cannot stand firmly*. And again, *I have come into the depth of the sea, and a tempest has overwhelmed me* [Ps. 69.3].

¶ **According to anagogy**, he remembers that he is in the heart of the sea—that is, in the middle of storms, and among the bitter waters, *tempted in all things without sin* [Heb. 4.15], yet he did not perceive the bitterness of the waters, but *he was surrounded* and revived by the sweetness of the stream, which *gladdens the city of God* [Ps. 46.5].

¶ **It is clear** that all these things happened literally in the person of Jonah. In Christ every temptation, which happened by the will of God, was without

sin, not overwhelming but fleeting, because in him every temptation lost its power, so that in him those who were accustomed to be imperiled might be freed through his conquering.

¶ **I am cast away:** I who took on the form of a slave, having imitated the frailty of man. Before, when I was light in your light, I was heard shouting; when this happened, I said, “*I am cast away*,” so that through this I might lead the human race back to you.

## Chapter 2

† He commands death and hell to receive the prophet, but as much as they rejoice in consuming him, they lament just as much in vomiting him up.

**A**nd the Lord prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and

† “*As Jonah was in the whale’s belly three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights*” [Matt. 12.40].

three nights. 2 †And Jonah prayed to the

† After he perceived that he was safe in the belly of the whale, he turns to beseeching the mercy of God.

Lord out of the womb of the fish. 3 †And he said, “I cried out of my tribulation to

† Christ, free among the dead, alive in hell, cries out, “*You will not leave my soul in hell; nor will you allow your holy one to see corruption*” [Ps. 16.10].

the Lord, and he heard me. †I cried out

† That is, from the belly of the whale, which, like hell, has a great capacity.

‡ You who test the kidneys and the heart.

of †the belly of hell, and ‡you heard my voice. 4 You cast me forth into the deep

† That is, in hell, for which the Gospel [says], *in the heart of the earth* [Matt. 12.40]; for just as the heart is in the middle of an animal, so is hell considered to be in the middle of the earth.

†in the heart of the sea, and the flood surrounded me; all your whirlpools and your waves have gone over me. 5 And I said, ‘I am cast away out of the sight of your eyes;



**¶I will see your temple:** This is appropriate to Jonah either as one desiring or as one trusting, who in the prophetic spirit was contemplating this future thing; it is also appropriate to Christ,

as we read: *“And now glorify me, O Father, along with yourself, with the glory which I had before the world came to be”* [John 17.5]. Just as the temple of the Father is the Son, so also the temple of the Son is the Father, about whom he himself said, *“I went forth from the Father and have come into the world”* [John 16.28].

**¶The abyss:** By “abyss” here is understood hostile forces, or powers devoted to torments, to which in the gospel the demons beg that they not be forced to go to be tortured.

**¶The sea has covered my head:** The historical sense is clear that Jonah came all the way to the depths of the earth, by which the globe of the land is held up, as if by bars and columns, by the will of God.

**¶Allegorically:** in Christ as a man, the soul was the principal part and, as it were, the head, which descended toward the lower regions where the souls of men were being held under the power of the devil. These are the bars that prevent souls from going out from hell; the Lord breaks these levers and frees those who were held confined.

**¶When my soul was anguished:** These [words] are fitting for Christ when he says, “My

*soul is sorrowful even unto death*” [Matt. 36.38; Mark 14.34], and again, *“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit”* [Luke 23.46; Ps. 32.6].

**¶That my prayer might come to:** For this

reason, I was mindful of God in tribulation so that out of the bottom of the sea my prayer might ascend to the heavens and so that it might come to your holy temple in which you enjoy eternal beatitude. And he prays because he is the high priest, so that his prayer might ascend to God so that in his own body the people might be freed.

**¶Those who observe:** Since all things are vanity, everyone necessarily does what is vain, but not all guard it like a treasure nor love what they do. Therefore he does not deny mercy to the whole human race.

**¶God, by nature merciful,** was prepared to save through mercy those whom he was not able to save through justice, but we by our vice abandoned the mercy he offered. And notice that the prophet

in the belly of the whale is oblivious to his own danger; he philosophizes concerning the general nature of things.

**¶The Jews, while they preserve the traditions of men,** forsake the commandments of God, who always had shown mercy toward them.

**¶But I with the voice:** Before his passion, Christ had in a certain sense tried to escape

† Even though I am cast away for a time.

‡ Placed in the depths of the sea, he is elsewhere by means of the prophetic spirit.

nevertheless,† I will see‡ your holy temple

† The waters of the world that carry filth along with them nurture the body but kill the soul. Nevertheless, they were not able to harm Christ because he bore them not out of necessity but willingly.

again.’ 6 †Many waters compassed me about to the limit of my life; the abyss has walled me in, the sea has covered my head. 7 I descended to the lowest parts of the mountains: the bars of the earth have

† ¶In the opinion of men. ¶In other words, confined.

‡ ¶And nevertheless. ¶You will not allow your holy one to see corruption [Ps. 16.10].

†surrounded me for eternity. ‡And you

† Lest, corrupted in death, I turn into the food of a beast. will lift up my life †from corruption,

† With this coaxing fondness, because through the greatness of [God’s] kindness to him he renders God, who is common to all, his own.

‡ In the belly of the whale, when according to the weakness of the flesh no hope remained, I conquered impossible things by my recollection of the Lord.

†Lord my God. 8 ‡When my soul was anguished within me, I remembered the Lord, that my prayer might come to you,

† Thus am I. But those who [observe . . .]

to your holy temple. 9 †Those who observe vanities in error forsake their own

† ¶Prepared for them. ¶Which does not forsake a man in his vanity, but waits for him to repent.

‡ Who for the salvation of many have been consumed.

†mercy. 10 But ‡I with the voice of praise

obeying God, when he says, "*It is not good to take the bread of the children*" [Matt. 15.26]. And again, "*Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me*" [Matt. 26.42].

But after his Resurrection, willingly leaving behind the faithless ones, he preaches to the world what had been commanded before the passion.

¶ **Whatever I have vowed:** In the passion he vowed all of us to the Father, so that none of those whom the Father had given him might perish. He promised for the salvation of all. Let us not make him a liar; let us be pure so that he might offer [us] to the Father.

¶ **And the word of the Lord was made:** All of this is fitting for Christ according to the form of a servant: that he is ordered; that he obeys; that he does not want it; that he is compelled once again to want it; that the second time he follows the Father's will.

¶ **And Jonah rose up:** Allegorically: Christ is rightly said to have risen after hell, and to preach when he sends the apostles to baptize people in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; this is the journey of three days. But this sacrament of human salvation is a journey of one day—that is, it is completed by the con-

fession of the one God. With Jonah—that is, Christ—preaching among the apostles, Christ who said, "*I am with you even to the end of the age*" [Matt. 28.20].

¶ **And Nineveh was:** Nineveh was so large that it could scarcely be circumnavigated by a journey of three days. But he, mindful of the command and of his shipwreck, completed the journey of three days in one day's haste. But some say that he preached only in a third of the city and immediately the word of his preaching spread to the other people.

¶ **It did not say in three days and nights or one day and night,** but [it said] *days and day* precisely, in order to show that nothing is shadowy in the mystery of the Trinity and the confession of the one God.

¶ **Yet forty days:** According to the Septuagint, *Yet three days and Nineveh will be destroyed*. The same Christ is signified, whether by *forty days* or by *three days*. It is by *forty*, of course, because he brought to conclusion forty days with his disciples and ascended into heaven; by *three*

*days* because he rose again on the third day.

¶ It is not a prophecy descending from the present [time] of God where all things are such that they endure, but the threat is for correction,

† Myself, who am victim and priest.

will sacrifice† to you. I will pay whatever I have vowed for my salvation to the Lord."

† It is decreed to the whale, to the abysses, and to hell that they restore the Savior to the earth, so that he might lead out with himself very many dead who were being held by the chains of death.

11 And the Lord said to the fish, † "Vomit

† Out of the deepest entrails of Death, the victrix Life went forth.

him up!" And it † vomited out Jonah onto dry land.

### Chapter 3

† He does not say to the prophet, "Why did you not do what I had commanded?" The devouring of the shipwreck suffices for correction, so that he who had not perceived the Lord commanding might perceive the Lord setting free.

**A**nd the word of the Lord was made to Jonah a second time, say-

† The world.

ing, 2 "Arise, and go to † Nineveh the great

† ¶ Father. ¶ "*I speak not of myself*" [John 14.10].

city, and preach in it the message that † I

† Son.

‡ ¶ From death. ¶ Obediently without delay.

§ Christ.

tell † you. 3 ‡ And § Jonah rose up and

† Through the apostles.

‡ Command.

† went to Nineveh, according to the ‡ word of the Lord. And Nineveh was a great city of three days' journey. 4 And Jonah began to enter into the city one day's journey,

† Standing in the temple, Christ cries out, "*Whoever thirsts, let her or him come to me and drink*" [John 7.37]. In truth, every speech of Christ, because it deals with great things, is called a cry.

and he † cried out, and said, "Yet forty



proposing a just retribution according to the present sins of the Ninevites.

¶A period of forty days is fitting for sinners for the sake of penitence and fasting and prayer and sackcloth and ashes and perseverance in begging for mercy. According to this number, Moses and Elijah and Christ himself fasted. This number is indicated for us for preparing our souls to eat the body of Christ.

¶A beautiful sequence: God commands the prophet; the prophet preaches to the city; the men believe first; when they preach fasting, people of every age are clothed with sackcloth. The men do not preach sackcloth but only fasting, but those to whom penitence is commanded add sackcloth so that their empty belly and their mournful clothing might more boldly beseech God.

¶Those who had offended God by luxury and ambition appease their condemnation through those things which had given offense before: first fasting, which is offered to God in secret, then sackcloth, which is displayed externally to men.

¶Nineveh according to Jerome: Nineveh, which was evil and well built, was overturned not with respect to its standing fortifications and build-

ings. The city was overturned in the destruction of its customs. And although what those men had feared did not happen, when Jonah prophesied the future, what he had predicted at God's command

did happen after all.

¶And the word came to the king:

After the weak and ignoble people had been chosen, at last the word of Christ arrived to the philosophers and powerful ones who seemed to rule the world. First Peter the fisherman enters, then Cyprian, formerly a champion of idolatry, finally believes, and having become a champion of truth after he heard the message of Jonah, he summons the Carthaginians to repentance and publicly preaches Christ. Behold the king of Nineveh rises from his throne and exchanges purple-dyed cloth for sackcloth, lotions for mud, purity for filth. It is a difficult thing for the powerful and eloquent of the world to convert to the humility of Christ.

¶And one cried out: He cried out, saying in Nineveh, from the mouth of the king and his princes, what had been decided.

Whence the Septuagint, *And it was preached in Nineveh from the king and from all of his elders.*

¶Who knows: He speaks to express uncertainty so that while the people are doubtful about

days, and Nineveh will be destroyed."

† Those who come into mature manhood in the age of Christ [cf. Eph. 4.13].

‡ The foreskin believes; the circumcision remains unfaithful.

5 And the Ninevite †men ‡believed in

† Sackcloth and fasting are the weapons of repentance. the Lord, and they preached a †fast, and

† Because nobody is without sin, not even an infant of one day.

put on sackcloth †from the greatest to the least. 6 And the word came to the king

† He humbled himself, setting aside the heights of power and eloquence.

of Nineveh; and he rose up† out of his throne, and cast away his robe from him,

† Of penitence for his past sins.

and was clothed with †sackcloth, and sat

† Not filth of the senses, but of words.

in †ashes. 7 And one cried out in Nineveh, and spoke from the mouth of the king and

† Rational beings.

of his princes, saying, "Let neither †men

† ¶Stupid beings. ¶You will save humans and beasts, Lord [Ps. 36.7].

‡ The wise.

§ The simple.

nor †beasts, ‡oxen nor §sheep, taste anything; let them not feed, nor drink water. 8 And let men and beasts be covered

† "Sackcloth" is said metaphorically, for a mourning disposition, grief, and sadness.

with †sackcloth, and cry out bravely to

† To the Lord.

the Lord, and let everyone †turn from his

† Which is from himself.

†evil way, and from the iniquity that is in

† Not only in thought but also in deed.

their †hands. 9 Who knows if God will

their salvation, they might perform penance more boldly and provoke God more to mercy.

¶**And God saw:** At that time God threatened the Ninevites and every day he threatens the

people of the world so that they might do penance. If they have converted, God also converts his judgment and is changed by the conversion of the people. He did not hear the words that Israel often used to send up—“*All that the Lord has spoken, we will do*” [Exod. 24.7]—but he, who desires the life more than the death of a sinner, saw their works. Seeing their changed works, he gladly changes his mind. Rather let us say that he persisted in his purpose, wishing from the beginning to show mercy. For he did not want to punish, nor was he who threatened about to punish.

¶**And Jonah was tormented:** He is not grieved that a great number of the Gentiles are being saved, but that he sees his own people perish, and he, chosen out of such a great number of prophets, who announced the ruin of his own people through the salvation of others,

is now in a certain way despairing of the salvation of Israel. Thus the Lord wept over Jerusalem, and *he did not want to cast the bread of the children*, etc. [Matt. 15.26, Mark 7.27]. The apostles

also preach first to Israel. Paul also wishes to be cursed for the sake of his brethren [Rom. 9.3].

¶**Beautifully Jonah**—that is, *suffering*—is troubled even unto death [cf. Matt. 26.38, Mark

14.34] because he endured many things, to the extent he was able, so that the people of the Jews might not perish; the prophet is weighed down by his labors, his travels, and his shipwreck.

¶**For I know that:** I knew that you were merciful and that you were going to do this. I did not want to bear an offensive message, but I wanted to flee to Tharsis—that is, to be free for contemplation and to enjoy quiet and leisure in the sea of this age; I departed my home having gone out from your bosom. If I said that you were forgiving and merciful, no one would do penance; that you were a cruel judge, I knew that this was not your nature. In this dilemma, therefore, I preferred rather to flee than either to deceive penitents by leniency or to proclaim what you were not [forgiving and merciful]. Therefore, *take my life*.

¶The saddened prophet

wishes to die, lest Israel perish forever once the multitude of the Gentiles converted.

¶**Do you think:** He does not say, “You are wrongly angry,” lest he seem to rebuke the

† To those who have converted.

‡ If this be done.

†turn, and ‡forgive, and will turn away

† Which he already has almost begun to pour out.

‡ Since he has turned.

from his †fierce anger, and ‡we shall not perish? 10 And God saw their works, that they were turned from their evil way, and

† Affliction.

God had mercy with regard to the †evil which he had said that he would do to them, and he did not do it.

#### Chapter 4

**A**nd Jonah was tormented with great torment, and was angry. 2 And

† About to say that he had justly wanted to flee, in a certain sense he accuses God of injustice. Therefore he tempers his grievances with a supplicatory preface, for he says, “*I beseech*,” which ought to be read with the disposition of flattery, for which in the Hebrew one reads, *anna*, which is the cry of a flatterer.

he prayed to the Lord, and said, †“I beseech you, Lord, is this not my word, when I was still in my country? Therefore I took the initiative to flee into Tharsis, for I know that you are a clement and merciful God, patient and of much compassion,

† “*My soul is sorrowful even unto death*” [Matt. 26.38, Mark 14.34], and, again, “*Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit*” [compline responsory; cf. Luke 23.46].

and forgiving evil. 3 And now, †Lord, I

† Alive, I was not able to save one tribe of Israel; I will die and the whole world will be saved.

pray, take my life from me †because death is better for me than life.” 4 And the

Lord said, “Do you think you are rightly



saddened one; nor does he say, "You are rightly angry," lest he go against his own opinion, but

God asks the angered one himself so that he might respond with the causes of his anger, or if he remain silent, the true judgment of God might be confirmed by his silence.

¶ And Jonah went out: Jonah—that is, the dove, or the grieving one—departs from the city, the city which Cain built, and he dwells facing the east, where the sun rises, and there he is in his tabernacle. He waits while some time passes, contemplating what might happen to the city of the world before Nineveh is saved through the gospel of Christ, and before the gourd is dried up and the true man rising is manifested. Jonah was under the bower because the truth had not yet appeared.

¶ And the Lord God prepared: In Hebrew we read *ciceion* for gourd (*cucurbita*), which sprouts quickly and withers quickly. It is compared to Israel sending down little roots into the earth and trying to be raised on high, but not equaling the height of the cedars of God or of the fir trees.

† World.

angry?" 5 And Jonah went out of the †city, and sat toward the east side of the city.

† Because none of the Ninevites was able to dwell with him at that time.

And he made for himself† a bower there,

† He sits as if he were a court witness, or as if one diminished in his dignity.

and he sat under it in the shade,† till he

† In the manner of Scripture, it joins human feelings with God.

might see what would happen to the city.†

6 And the Lord God prepared an ivy,

† Suddenly by the wondrous power of God.

and it ascended† over Jonah's head to be a shade over his head and to cover him, for he was fatigued. And Jonah was delighted with the ivy. 7 And God prepared

† Christ, who says, "I am a worm, and no man" [Ps. 22.7].

a †worm when the morning arose on the

† Which was green before the sun of justice rose, but when Christ rose, the arbor was deprived of God's help and it lost all its verdure.

following day, and it struck the †ivy and it

† With whose light the shadows of the Ninevites were dispersed.

withered. 8 And when the †sun was risen,

† Whence in Hosea, *the Lord will bring a burning wind that will rise from the desert, and it will dry up his springs and make his fountain[s] desolate* [Hos. 13.15].

the Lord commanded a †hot and burning wind, and the sun beat on Jonah's head,

† Along with Israel.

and he burned.† And he desired for his

† In baptism, so that in washing he might receive the liquid he had wasted in denial. Whence Peter says to the parched Jews, "Do penance, and be baptized every one of you, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" [Acts 2.38].

soul that he might die,† and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." 9 And the

† Father.

‡ To him.

† Lord said to ‡Jonah, "Do you think you

¶ Gourd (*cucurbita*) or ivy (*hedera*) is a kind of brushwood or shrub that has broad leaves and

supports a very dense canopy, which creeps along the ground, and without props to lean on it does not seek higher parts. But God prepared this so that it might provide for the prophet a bower suddenly rising into the sky without any supports—in which God's power was shown. Israel is compared to this ivy or gourd. Israel once protected Jonah under its own shade—that is, Christ—awaiting the conversion of the nations. The vine provided no small joy, making for him a bower, which has the appearance of a house but is not one, because it does not have foundations.

¶ And God prepared: Some understand the worm and burning wind to be the Romans who after the resurrection of Christ destroyed Israel.

¶ Do you think you are rightly: The prophet, when similarly asked about the penitent Ninevites who had been saved, makes no answer but confirms God's ques-

tion by his silence, for knowing that God is merciful and forgiving of sins, he did not grieve

over the salvation of the Gentiles. But here since the gourd has been dried up Israel burns, and because he was questioned with a qualification, "*Do you think you are rightly angry about the ivy?*" he confidently says, "*I am rightly saddened, even unto death.*" For I did not want thus to save some that others might perish; I did not want thus to benefit aliens that I might destroy my own people." Thus Christ is bewailing Jerusalem even unto a death not his own, but that of the Jews, so that those who deny the son of God might die and the ones who confess him might rise again.

¶ **You have not labored:** As far as the people of the Gentiles are concerned, whence

Israel confidently says, "*Behold, I serve you for so many years . . . and yet you have never given me a kid, . . . but . . . you have killed the fatted calf for this one who has devoured his inheritance with whores.*" Whoever is not shocked at this, but

are rightly angry about the ivy?" And he said, "I am rightly angry even unto death."

† Son.

10 And the Lord said, † "You grieve for the

† For the Jews who have been condemned.

† ivy, for which you have not labored nor

† That is, in the time before the coming of Christ.

made to grow, which was born in † one

† When the sun of justice lay dead to him.

night, and in † one night perished. 11 And

† Through which is signified the Church, in which there is a greater number than that of the twelve tribes of Israel.

should I not spare the great city † Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred twenty thousand people who do not know the difference between their right hand

† A great number of irrational beings.

and their left, and many † beasts?

hears it, "*All that I have is yours. But it was fitting that we should make merry for the return of the brother*" [Luke 15.31–32]. For the sake of the Gentiles, indeed, the precious blood of Christ was poured out and he himself descended to

hell so that that people might ascend to heaven. No work of such magnitude was [done] on behalf of the sons of Israel, and because of this he envies his younger brother.

¶ **More than a hundred twenty thousand:** We can understand this with regard to the age of infancy, which is innocent and simple, and since the number of little ones is so great, it is clear that the multitude of advanced age was greater. Or

because Nineveh is a great city and in a great house there are vessels not only of gold but also of clay, it can be said that there was a very great multitude who, before doing penance, did not know the difference between good and evil.



## Envisioning World Literature in 1863: From the Reports on a Mission Abroad

### Introduction

*Veselovsky has assigned a task to scholarship which can hardly ever be solved. The Russian formalists, however, have taken up his challenge.*

—René Wellek (279)

*The task, which many feel is beyond their abilities, lies within the power of scholarship.*

—A. N. Veselovsky

A. N. VESELOVSKY

TRANSLATION BY  
JENNIFER FLAHERTY

EDITED AND WITH AN  
INTRODUCTION BY BORIS MASLOV

ALEXANDER NIKOLAEVICH VESELOVSKY (1838–1906) IS WIDELY REGARDED AS RUSSIA'S MOST DISTINGUISHED AND INFLUENTIAL LITER-

ary theorist before the formation of Opoyaz ("Society for the Study of Poetic Language"), whose members—Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Eikhenbaum, Yury Tynianov, Roman Jakobson, and others—developed the approach generally known as Russian formalism. Readers of Shklovsky may note the prominence accorded to Veselovsky in *Theory of Prose* (1925). Some will also recall the use of the term *historical poetics*—in reference to the method put forward by Veselovsky—in the 1963 edition of Mikhail Bakhtin's book on Dostoevsky and in his "The Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel: Notes towards a Historical Poetics" (1937–38, pub. in 1975). Another eloquent testimony to Veselovsky's spectral ubiquity in Russian literary theory is the concluding paragraph of Vladimir Propp's pathbreaking *Morphology of the Folktale*, where Propp humbly asserts that his "propositions, although they appear to be new, were intuitively foreseen by none other than Veselovsky" and ends his study with an extensive quotation from Veselovsky's *Poetics of Plot* (115–16). It is rarely recognized, however, that Veselovsky's method, in its rudimentary form, constitutes a common denominator of Shklovsky's, Bakhtin's, and Propp's widely divergent approaches.<sup>1</sup>

*Historical Poetics*, Veselovsky's magnum opus, left incomplete at the time of his death, is generally held to be the foundational work of Russian literary criticism. Veselovsky conceived of it as a summation of his life's work, which included books on Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Vasily Zhukovsky and studies

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on topics as diverse as Italian Renaissance culture, Slavic folklore, comparative epic studies, the ancient Greek novel, and East-West literary ties. These studies are exemplary in their erudition and attention to detail. To quote René Wellek's assessment, Veselovsky "must be classed among the greatest literary scholars of the [nineteenth] century in breadth of knowledge and scope of competence" (278–79).

The two epigraphs encapsulate the challenge Veselovsky faced in his early methodological reflections, translated here.<sup>2</sup> The challenge was no less than a complete overhaul of the study of literature that would raise it to the standards of rigorous, "scientific" inquiry exemplified by such newly established disciplines as ethnography, comparative linguistics, and comparative mythology. Veselovsky's youthful attempt at conceptualizing literary history evokes the promise, as well as the predicaments, of the emergent scholarly field of world (general) literature, which would later be transformed into the discipline of comparative literature. In particular, these reflections question the currently widespread view that the nineteenth-century discourse on world literature—and, more broadly, nineteenth-century comparativist thinking on literature—sprang from and continued Goethe's fragmentary reflections on *Weltliteratur*.<sup>3</sup> Veselovsky's remarks, issuing from the German academy of the early 1860s, attest to the vitality of a paradigm of literary comparatism formulated on analogy with such established disciplines as comparative philology and general (universal) history.<sup>4</sup> Veselovsky understands world literature (всеобщая литература) as a totality of national literatures that are related historically and morphologically, not—in Goethe's fashion—as a transnational field of cultural exchange and translation.

In addition to complicating received views on world literature, Veselovsky's early theoretical reflections speak directly to what is possibly the central problem of literary studies today: its self-definition with respect to the changing configuration of fields of knowledge. Veselovsky argues in favor of an astonishingly broad definition of literary history, which he equates with cultural history (*Kulturgeschichte*). While clearly at odds with many

strands of twentieth-century literary theory, Veselovsky's principled rejection of the aesthetic criterion as an ahistorical construct that is detrimental (especially) to the comparative study of literature may prompt us to review the methodological implications of contemporary historicism(s). In a formulation that appears to presage new historicism, Veselovsky in one of the reports translated here insists that a history of, for example, Provençal poetry should exclude "neither the Provençal *Elucidarius* nor the didactic treatise about hunting birds or the instructions of the jongleur." Yet, as Veselovsky's remarks (and his work on the whole) suggest, the view of literary texts as cultural productions rather than aesthetic artifacts calls for a particular kind of comparatism, one that goes beyond contextualist historicism. Arguably, the post-new-historicist privileging of proximate historical contexts presents difficulties both to comparative work (which has effectively become a *pia fraus* ["pious fraud"]—to borrow Veselovsky's expression—at many comparativist departments in the United States) and to serious engagement with literary form. Veselovsky's approach to literary texts—and literary forms—as testimonies to the *longue durée* of social and cultural history may provide a welcome respite from the modern fixation on the *histoire événementielle* and perhaps an invitation to engage with historicism itself as a historical phenomenon. On the other hand, Veselovsky's gentle polemic with Heymann Steinthal, one of his teachers in Berlin, indicates an interest in defining the specificity of literary works as objects sui generis operating in a wider cultural-historical field; this interest, combined with a consistently historical perspective, would remain characteristic of the Russian tradition of historical poetics.<sup>5</sup>

This translation includes two of five reports written by Veselovsky while he was studying at Berlin University and published in 1863 and 1864. It omits some of the sections that describe his course work. The same two reports were chosen for inclusion (under the title "From the Reports on a Mission Abroad") in the most authoritative collection of Veselovsky's work on historical poetics, prepared by Viktor Zhirmunsky in 1940 (Истори-



ческая поэтика). As compared with Zhirmunsky's edition, this translation includes a few additional paragraphs from the original publication that shed more light on Veselovsky's intellectual experience in Berlin. The original reports were untitled. We have also taken the liberty of introducing additional paragraph divisions. In preparing the endnotes, none of which were part of the original publication, I made use of Zhirmunsky's notes to the 1940 edition. In translating *всеобщая литература*, we have opted for "world literature," inasmuch as *всеобщая* ("universal, general") in this phrase is synonymous with *всемирная* ("world").<sup>6</sup>

## NOTES

1. For the centrality of Veselovsky's method to the Russian critical tradition, see Shaitanov; Kliger and Maslov. Other Russian literary scholars whose work is available in English and who, in various ways, engaged with and built on Veselovsky's legacy are Lidia Ginzburg, Olga Freidenberg, and Mikhail Gasparov. I discuss the reception of Veselovsky in the twentieth century, including Wellek's assessment, in a forthcoming article. Zhirmunsky, "А. Н. Веселовский," and Engelgardt provide introductions to Veselovsky's methodology and overviews of his scholarly work; see also an important overlooked statement by Shklovsky ("Александр Веселовский"). Erlich 26–32 and Zhirmunsky, "On the Study," are succinct summaries of Veselovsky's works and method in English. Further bibliography on Veselovsky and a list of translations of his work can be found at *Historical Poetics: An Online Resource*.

2. The articles were originally published in the journal of the Russian Imperial Ministry of Education, *Журнал министерства народного просвещения* 117 (Feb. 1863, sec. 2, 152–60) and 119 (Sept. 1863, sec. 2, 440–48), under the rubric "Selections from the Reports of Those Sent Abroad in Preparation for Professorship."

3. The assumption of the paramount importance of Goethe's notion of world literature for reflections on literary comparison in the second half of the nineteenth century underlies, e.g., Birus; Hoesel-Uhlig; and Pizer. For a more balanced assessment, see Berczik 15–18. In fact, even the German term *Weltliteratur* in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries most often had generic meanings such as "the totality of literatures of the world" and "the best of literatures of the world," neither of which was intended by Goethe (Lamping 98–113).

4. The new comparative disciplines provided the obvious model for transnational discussion of literature.

The relevance of comparative (Indo-European) linguistics is more fully discussed by Veselovsky in his 1870 lecture "On the Methods and Aims of Literary History as a Science"; an English translation of this lecture was published, at Wellek's instigation, in 1967. It is interesting to compare that lecture with a programmatic lecture by Charles Chauncey Shackford, delivered at Cornell in 1871 (in the words of his modern editors, "the first known formal presentation concerning the discipline of comparative literature to be given in the United States"). Shackford argues that the comparative method, "which is pursued in anatomy, in language, in mythology," presents "the only satisfactory course in which general literature can be pursued" (42). For his part, Veselovsky would repeatedly point to the epistemological limits of comparative (Indo-European) mythology and of the mythopoetic aesthetics of verbal art associated with figures like Steinthal and Alexander Potebnya. In his 1864 student report he is more outspoken than in his critique of Steinthal translated here, as he plainly asserts the inapplicability of "the principle that unites the history of literature with the history of language" to postmythical literary cultures (396–97).

5. The influence of Steinthal, one of the founding figures in modern psychology, on Veselovsky is examined in Trautmann-Waller, *Aux origines* 286–88 and "Народная литература" 27–30.

6. Мочалова 308. On the term *general literature*, see Wellek and Warren 17.

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## Envisioning World Literature in 1863: From the Reports on a Mission Abroad

THE DEPARTMENT OF THE HISTORY OF WORLD literature has yet to be granted citizenship in Germany, at least in the sense in which there exist the departments of world history, of general philology, and so on. One need only glance at the curricula of German universities in the current year to be convinced of this: [Karl] Höck (in Göttingen), [Franz Ludwig Anton] Schweiger (also in Göttingen),

[Karl Friedrich] Merleker (in Königsberg), and [Franz von] Löher (in Munich) have not made a name for themselves as scholars.

On the other hand, the history of particular literatures is being actively studied, mostly in relation to the history of the language or to the reading of this or that text. In this regard German scholars are far ahead of what is being done or has been accomplished by other scholars. [Friedrich] Diez, [Adolf] Ebert, [Karl] Bartsch, [Ludwig] Blanc, [Nicolaus] Delius, [Adelbert von] Keller, and [Wilhelm]



Wackernagel are the leaders in Romance studies (I have only named those who hold chairs at universities, and I have not mentioned Ferdinand Wolf). This semester, Ebert is lecturing on the history of Italian literature, [Friedrich] Zarncke, in Leipzig, on the history of German literature before the Reformation; [Karl] Müllenhoff lectured last summer on the history of German literature before the thirteenth century. I do not go into great detail because that would lead us too far afield. The fact is that in Germany, where there is both world history and general philology, the department of world literature does not exist.

We suppose the existence of world literature possible, if only in the sense of world history. World history is not the history of humanity—of some shared idea of being human that manifests itself in various authors that one calls nationalities. Rather, world history is a history of nationalities that abstract thought has collected under one idea of humanity. What is common to them is that they all develop according to one and the same physical and moral laws, insofar as there are in fact connections between them in war and in peace through borrowing and conquest. What they also share is a striving toward the improvement of everyday life that one calls progress. Yet with regard to the various kinds of general ideas and forms manifesting themselves in the history of humanity, there exist as many doctrines as there are congregations. World history remains all the same a general history of nationalities; we will not be mistaken if we construe the history of world literature as the general history of literatures.

Now it is clear why such a history does not exist. The immensity of material would intimidate the most resourceful intellect; philological preparation alone would take dozens of years. We need only think of the task of collecting and publishing material that is far from gathered and brought to light. Denigrating Russian scholarship, we consider a factual history of Russian literature an im-

possibility, given the current paucity of basic data. The author of “an overview of Russian religious literature” even considered it “an unwise undertaking.”<sup>1</sup> We are surprised when in 1862 in that scholarly Germany which reads and teaches all the Semitic dialects we hear almost the same words. “All histories of (German) literature,” says [Emil] Weller (*Annalen der poetischen Nationalliteratur der Deutschen im XVI und XVII Jahrh.* [vol. 1, p. v–vi]), “all histories of German literature were hitherto fragmentary; that is, they spoke of what their authors had found ready to hand in one or another library, or of what had previously been discussed. An essay by [Karl] Goedeke, the best of its kind, says nothing about the treasures of the libraries of Vienna, Munich, Dresden, Ulm, Augsburg, Würzburg, Nuremberg, and Switzerland . . . Our annals comprise two thousand more poems than Goedeke’s essay, and that is only in the first three sections.”

We note that the historian of literature must at the same time be a publisher and an archaeologist, and be at work in both conveyance and construction. To say nothing of people devoted solely to publishing: what have the Grimms not published? Their editorial work on German fairy tales and on the songs in the Edda has a genealogical connection with their German mythology. Such an absence of the first condition of any developed economic production, the division of labor, directly indicates that production is at a low level of development. We speak of political economy as a new science but one that is already defined, having its future and its path set clearly before it. We also speak of the science of folk psychology as one that promises much, though it lives by a single journal.<sup>2</sup> Of world literature we say nothing, just as we say nothing of mathematics, music, and other liberal arts that have been dispiriting humanity since the time of Martianus Capella. And, indeed, it is only *pia fraus*, wishful thinking: world literary history as a field of scholarship does not yet exist; it remains to be created.

Indeed, what is the history of world literature? What is the history of literature at all? Literature is what is written down [письменность]—but this excludes popular epic, songs, and the abundance of unwritten works, which, being unwritten, neither drown nor burn but only grow old organically and likewise become extinct. Literature is letters [словесность]. This definition frightens the scholar who proposed it; having sensed its enormous capacity, he hastens to hide from it, like Ilya Muromets, who slammed the lid on the mighty Svyatogor.<sup>3</sup> Letters? All sorts of things would fit under this definition: the history of scholarship, of poetry, of theological questions, of economic systems, of philosophical constructs. The range is enormous. But definitions are not made to suit a single person, and scholarship still less so—and is there any reason why it is necessary to exclude even the history of scholarship from the history of letters? In the first volume of [Heinrich] von Sybel's journal, a few thoughts were expressed apropos what remains to be done in German historical science; the history of scholarship was set as a desideratum to future researchers.<sup>4</sup> I see no reason why this proposal could not have been made in any literary-historical journal. Some might point out to me that the history of scholarship is an independent field of knowledge, that the history of philosophy is also an autonomous field of study, as is the history of the church. But what then is the history of literature?

We thus imperceptibly turn to the widely received definition of the history of literature that restricts it to a small circle of belles lettres and to poetry in a broad sense. This definition is quite narrow, however inclusive the notion of poetry. Why exactly is the history of literature assigned to the domain of the refined, and within what limits? I do not think that any contemporary person would privilege questions of aesthetics or the development of poetic ideas. The time of manuals on rhetoric and poetics is irretrievably past. Even those gentlemen who would wish to create the his-

tory of poetry out of the history of literature defend themselves with a justification that is not at all poetic but is borrowed from another camp: poetry is the color of national life, that indistinct realm where the character of the nation is interminably and integrally expressed along with its purposes, its deeply ingrained aspirations, and its original identity. This justification destroys itself and leads directly from poetry to life. Indeed, to understand the color of life—that is, poetry—we must, I think, begin with the study of life itself; to smell the soil, we must stand on it.

The history of Provençal poetry cannot be limited to the biographies of troubadours or to the sirventes of Bertran de Born and the moralizing songs of Giraut de Borneyl. Biographies of the troubadours lead to [the topics of] chivalry, castle life, and the predicament of women in the Middle Ages. Against the clear background of the Crusades, the significance of the love song will be more lucidly revealed. Similarly, the sirventes compel us to discuss the Albigenses and their nonpoetic literature. I believe that neither the Provençal *Elucidarius* nor the didactic treatise about hunting birds or the instructions of the jongleur should be excluded from observation.<sup>5</sup> All this also belongs to the history of literature, though it does not have the pretense to be called poetry. To separate such works [from the history of literature] would be as inappropriate as if someone conceived of limiting the study of Dante to a poetic economy of *The Divine Comedy* and ceding historical allusions, medieval cosmogony, and theological debates in paradise to the specialists. Specialized research is not thereby ruled out, nor is the history of scholarship as a separate field of study.

Having established a notion of literary history as the history of belles lettres, Professor [Stepan] Shevyrev himself was compelled to expand his definition when it came to the facts. His history of Russian letters is least of all a history of poetry. If hagiographies and sermons predominate therein, this is only par-



tially explained by his predilection for one or the other of these two moral-didactic genres; indeed, it could not have been otherwise, and it seems to us that the correct proportions have been observed. "Yaroslav's silver" was, of course, out of place.<sup>6</sup> If [Emil] Ruth's history of Italian poetry, consisting of two thick volumes, contains numerous details about novelists and writers of novellas while saying almost nothing about Machiavelli (except as the author of *The Mandrake*), it is a history not of literature but of poetry, as the author himself called it.<sup>7</sup>

The history of Italian poetry without Machiavelli, without Giordano Bruno? Such a lack is not compensated for by historical introductions, geographic or political orientations, or chapters about everyday life, which for some time now have been in vogue and are appended in the back of the book haphazardly, without any intrinsic connection to its content. Such appendices are of no aid; they explain nothing. They only add an extra measure of discomfort and distress to future literary scholars. As long as the historical and everyday aspect remains nothing but an appendix or an accessory, a *Beiwerk*, of literary inquiry, the history of literature will remain as it has been up until now: a bibliographic guide, an aesthetic excursus, a treatise on itinerant stories, or a political sermon. Until then, literary history cannot exist.

We turn again to von Sybel's journal, which is of particular interest to us for the views on the discipline of history expressed in it by leaders in German historiography and for the hopes they placed on the future development of this historiography. In one of the first volumes, in a short report on [Karl] Biedermann's book, an unknown critic voiced his doubts concerning the feasibility of the field of cultural history, *Kulturgeschichte*.<sup>8</sup> Biedermann's book serves as his example: despite the author's talent, has he succeeded in delivering anything coherent or organic? Nothing of coherence resulted, only a little bit of everything: political history, everyday

life, archaeology, literature, philosophy, and all sorts of other things. What if all academia roused itself and set off on a campaign against *Kulturgeschichte*, each discipline claiming its proper part? The whole of *Kulturgeschichte* would then be disassembled part by part, and nothing would remain. The historical section would be transferred to history, the philosophical, to philosophy. Cultural history is *ein Unding* ["nonsense"]. Instead, there is the history of history, the history of philosophy, of literature, and so on. If we asked the author Biedermann what the history of literature is, we do not know whether he could provide an answer to this difficult question. If he could not, we might suggest our own: the history of literature is precisely the history of culture.

Now it is clear why the history of world literature did not find for itself a permanent department in German universities. If entire books are devoted to the particles μέν and δέ and to the Basque verb for *to be*, and if people dedicate their entire lives to the study of Dante or the Breton cycle of legends, the history of the literary life of a nation also demands an entire life's work. To fully understand and appreciate what constitutes a nation's identity—its distinctiveness—one must become one with the nation; one must live one's way into it, become acclimated to it, and—if one is not born in its milieu—adopt its peculiarities and its habits. We cannot get away with generalizations here. Conclusions about the integrity of development, about the general character of the life of a nation—if it exists—should be the result of a long series of microscopic tests rather than serve as the point of departure; otherwise, the danger of taking one's own view as fact lies in wait.

The more cohesive national life may sometimes appear to be, the more careful and painstaking one's investigation should be, lest an appearance of external orderly development be mistaken for an internal connection of phenomena. The facts of life are connected by a mutual dependence: economic conditions call forth a particular historical formation,

and together they determine one or another kind of literary activity. It is not possible to separate one from the other. The complete unit is like a circulatory system in which each small vein that lurks at the edges of the living body has a direct genealogical connection with the heart even though what lies within the heart remains unknown, whether it is poetry or prose, and whether it is indeed only poetry that accounts for the color of national life.

The best histories of literature have been written by scholars who made a name for themselves in Europe with works on political history: [Georg Gottfried] Gervinus, [Friedrich Christoph] Schlosser, [Leopold von] Ranke (whose *Zur Geschichte der Italienischen Poesie* retains its significance). We conclude that the reverse is also true: a good historian of literature should at the same time be a historian of everyday life. Tell me how a nation lived, and I will tell you how it wrote: the best literary historians have earnestly applied themselves to *Kulturgeschichte*. I will mention only [Karl] Weinhold. Emerson's phrase—that each of us experiences the entire boundless history of humanity from the comfort of our own microcosm—remains a mere phrase, admittedly beautiful and in the highest degree humanistic. Should we possess an all-too-expansive heart, it may well finish with an aneurysm. Fair enough if one is able to experience within oneself the life of a single nation. The history of literature, as I understand it, can exist only as a specialized field.

It is another question whether practicing literary history in this manner is possible for us in Russia. It seems to me that it is not. Our scholarship is still at the primitive level of economy: a single pair of hands must accomplish much work that in more advanced conditions of life is distributed among many laborers. Even if there were a desire to specialize, where would one focus one's efforts or attention when there is nothing yet in existence and nothing to choose from? When possible, we must supply literary history with more prolegomena,

provide aid to those who seek to orient themselves in a mass of facts, and indicate the pivotal points on which a later, more felicitous and more specialized inquiry could be based. Such an encyclopedic review should not, of course, exclude original research. If this review does not forge new paths, then, when possible, it should verify those traveled by Western scholarship so that one is not led blindly by the mentor's words and repeat lessons learned long ago. Such is, in my opinion, the task of departments of world literature in Russian universities: instead of specialized research and a distrust of manuals and secondhand knowledge, it is the transmission of the results of Western scholarship, critically verified and elucidated.

This is how I understood my task, and in Berlin I have selected several specialized courses. [. . .]

Berlin, 9–18 December 1862

In the historical-philological sciences, a revolution is now under way such as there has not been since perhaps the time of the great renewal of knowledge of the classics. Revolutions are always linked to an unexpected expansion of one's field of vision in both a moral and a physical sense. This is all the more true the further we are from the beginning of history, when human beings were more tightly connected with nature and their development had not yet created its own laws, sanctified by tradition—when the masses were more malleable and their development smoother. The closer we are to our own moment in time, the more clearly the system of social laws appears in opposition to the laws of purely physiological life, which everywhere constitutes the lining of this system. But this lining is deeply embedded, having passed through the whole series of transmissions; it had time to mold itself into customs and laws [формулироваться в обычай и закон], such that the forms of these customs and laws are already developing further. This is what we call progress or organic development. On the other side there is organic decline, which



takes place in perfect accord with the rules of society and history, just as a doctor lets a sick patient die according to the rules of his art.

Revolution occurs when into this quiet development, which springs from its own principles, there intrudes a host of new principles and facts that must then be reckoned with. Whichever side gains the advantage in the struggle between the new and the old, the result will always be a trade-off—neither a victory nor a defeat. This is one of the fruitful results of Hegel's philosophy on which the Tübingen school built its history of Christianity. New vistas open in the distance, often accompanied by a spatial widening of the horizon as if the expansion of purview were closely connected with a wider familiarity with the outside world. In this way the paths to the East that were opened during the Crusades laid a broader foundation for medieval culture, elevating the ideal of the knight to the Templar Knights and the Holy Grail. It is worth comparing the representations of William of Gellone in the *chanson de geste* of the eleventh and twelfth centuries with, for example, Tasso's Godfrey of Bouillon, a figure that marks the highest realization of the ideal of the knight in the Breton circle, albeit a one-sided one. Devotees of epic naïveté and of a primitive simplicity in morals prefer, of course, the Aquitaine hero. This is a matter of personal taste. Here even comparison is not possible because comparisons can only be performed between like variables; to compare the past of a nation with its present and thus arrive at a condemnatory verdict amounts to nothing, as does a comparison between the potential for development and its realization. Certainly no one would dispute that in the later chivalrous romances, the scope of moral principles—whatever they may be—is incomparably greater than in so-called heroic epic. So what is more interesting in the end: a life fully lived and experienced [прожитая жизнь] along with its hard-won results, whatever they are, or the absence of any life—a life of instincts and animal strength, where a

knight-errant stabs another through with his lance so that one could hang a coat on its protruding tip, "qui s'en fust pris bien garde" ["if one did it very carefully"]?<sup>9</sup>

Those same Crusades were the first to elevate the significance of towns and the middle class back home while the knights were earning their honor in Palestine. On their return, they encountered an entire literature—which they themselves had brought from the East—of fabliaux, short stories of the middle-class apologues, and novellas. There is no doubt that most of these stories already existed in the West before the Crusades, brought from the common Asiatic homeland. But they lacked the impetus to develop into the immense literary corpus in which chivalrous literature gradually drowned. The impetus came from the East—the same place where chivalry attained its lofty ideals of struggle and of self-sacrifice. Since the second half of the thirteenth century, literature takes on an increasingly middle-class, didactic character. The place of the romance is now occupied by the novella, legend, exhortation; verse makes the transition to prose. Even the knights of the romances of this time bear the Flemish stamp: they set out on the road not headfirst but after arranging their domestic affairs and securing enough money for the journey. This remained true throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; we are speaking of Germany in particular.

At this point again new vistas open toward the East and the West. Greek scholars come from the East; Europeans set out to the West in search of the New World. We are aware of the magnitude of the consequences that this expansion of the conceptual and geographic horizon had for both the moral and the material development in our part of the globe. The fruitful effects of both were felt in the sixteenth century. We are almost ready to accept that history—or what we usually refer to as history—moves forward only with the aid of such unexpected catalysts, whose necessity does not lie in the sequential, isolated development

of the organism. In other words, all of history consists in *Vermittlung der Gegensätze* ["negotiation between opposites"] because any history consists in struggle. Isolate a nation, remove it from the throes of struggle, and then attempt to write its history—if there will be a history. Until then we do not believe in the possibility of a physical construction of historical phenomena. History is not physiology. If it develops according to exclusively physiological principles, it ceases to be history. [Henry Thomas] Buckle attempted to create for European historical life what is feasible only for the Eskimos or Hot-tentots, and even then only until they encounter the first foreigner. The first foreigner alone would disturb the physiological peace of their life; an exchange with alien thought raised on different soil and amid different concepts would infringe on the proper course of their own thoughts. To define the laws of these collisions is of course impossible, at least for us. Everything is limited to such general truths as the enslavement of the lower civilizations by the higher, the compromise between the struggling principles, and so on. It is still not the time for the science of history, for the physiological science of history. And will it ever be?

In recent times, historical-philological studies have indeed been given a more scientific basis than in the past. The rapid progress that they have made on entering this new solid ground promises extensive results in the future. It would be audacious to claim that these results will reverberate in all of historical science, yet even now Buckle would be able to take advantage of some of them for the first chapters of his history of civilization as demonstrated by the work of [Adalbert] Kuhn, [Adolphe] Pictet, and others with respect to the description of primitive culture. Instead, we receive a rather meager list of influences on the human, such as those produced by climate, nutrition, and similar natural conditions. In a word, history is being constructed above—and in spite of—the human, while its construction should start with humanity itself, viewed as a physiologi-

cal and psychological entity that is, of course, subject to the influence of the surrounding environment yet is in possession of enough material within itself to evolve of its own accord.

The new science of linguistics will contribute the most to the advancement of such an immanent approach to history, at least in some of its aspects. This is yet another of the felicitous results of the expansion of the conceptual and spatial horizon of which we have so often spoken. The English have conquered India; English scholarship conquered Indian scholarship. Sir William Jones was the first to discover that Sanskrit is cognate with Greek, Latin, and most living European languages. The discovery, while itself seeming of little importance, led to the classic work of [Franz] Bopp and a complete renovation of philological studies. Sanskrit was integrated into the Prussian university education system thanks to the efforts of Wilhelm von Humboldt and [Karl von] Altenstein and nowadays is represented in almost all German universities; professorial chairs for Sanskrit have spread even to America, and with them, the study of comparative grammar. The English have already produced a popular manual *for the use of students*.<sup>10</sup>

It has been noted above what an enormous influence new gains in linguistics can have on the scholarly methods of the discipline of history. Not without reason, earlier this year [Adolf] Stenzler proclaimed comparative grammar a part of the comparative history of culture. ("Ich betrachte daher die vergleichende Grammatik nur als einen Zweig der vergleichenden Kulturgeschichte des ganzen Volksstammes.")<sup>11</sup> Not to mention the fact that with its aid, dark corners of the historical world that archaeology dared not touch have been illuminated: comparative grammar called forth the science of comparative mythology. Its influence has also spread to the study of German epics and novellas proper. Previously, when we considered the similarity between two narratives, it was fashionable to speak of borrowing, whereas now we have



become accustomed to referring to our common Asian fatherland, whence we brought language and our common customs and beliefs. Perhaps these references go too far, misused under the influence of an exclusive love for national literature [народная литература]. Borrowing, you see, is offensive; inheritance is not offensive, although inheritance is also borrowing—especially if handed to us from such distant progenitors as our forefathers of the Iranian highlands. Accordingly, the jackal in *Hitopadesa*, who fell into a tub of blue paint, and the story of the Reinhard fox stained in gold are adduced as derivations from a single common prototype of the legend. “Our German scholars,” says Gervinus on this occasion,

helped create a new science of linguistics. The kinship between modern languages everywhere indicated to them an ancient source. This was natural, since languages can be changed beyond recognition but cannot be completely rejected. Legends and works of poetry are a different matter. The Crusades drowned almost all memory of the time of the Ottonians. In our fatherland, the Great Migration of peoples destroyed grand memories of the past; amid these great devastations of antiquity,<sup>12</sup> amid God knows how many thousands of years of transigrations, a fable about a fox painted in gold and blue was preserved! The fact that so much was preserved in language is already surprising; we cannot presume the same about an unstable saga. It seems to us that even in language, too little attention is paid to the fact that the same sense of observation, directed at the same objects, could find—on its own accord—similar expressions for inner impressions. And these it probably often found. If one is to derive all the similarities in history from such supposed prehistoric sources, there would be no law of inner development, and not a single nation or individual could take a single step without borrowing.<sup>13</sup>

As we have said, the path for those searching for this “law of inner development” has been blazed by the new philosophical direc-

tion recently taken by the science of language. We see how gradually the science of language passes from abstract questions regarding the beginning of language to such vital questions as the beginning of myth, of custom, and of a nation’s character and psychology. An introduction to literary history taught by [Heymann] Steinthal this semester also belongs to the disciplines that acquire new meaning and a clearer significance through the influence of a philosophical-linguistic perspective. When Steinthal asks himself about the beginning of art and finds it in religion, the answer takes on a meaning completely different from that of platitudes on the origin of drama in the festivals of Dionysus, the religious origins of Greek sculpture, and so on. The well-known empirical difference between poetry and other representational arts—namely, that poetry depicts actions while sculpture and painting depict states—attains a deeper meaning when compared with the differences between symbol and myth, word and sentence. The word is a symbol; the sentence and the phrase are myths. According to Steinthal, the word originates from the sentence, while the symbol originates from myth; poetry should have therefore appeared earlier than other arts. Myth must have existed in poetry so that representational arts could depict the myth symbolically.

In this way myth, language, and art meet in a higher unity and explain one another. What has hitherto remained obscure in footnotes and addenda will now be introduced into the actual text. The study of the fine arts should undergo radical change along with the antiquated doctrine that professes the identity of that which is beautiful, true, and good.

As can be seen from the foregoing discussion, Steinthal’s “introduction” is characterized by an aesthetic-critical approach, posing general questions regarding beauty, form, and the differences between various arts. A historical survey of notions of literary history from the ancient Greeks to Schlegel and Gervinus by itself took Steinthal several lectures

to complete. In my first report I was able to express my opinion on the study of literary history. A task was set before us: to trace the history of cultural formation [образование] without limiting it to mere *Geschichte der Dichtung* ["history of poetry"] and accommodating within it the history of philosophical constructs and religious ideals. The task, which many feel is beyond their abilities, lies within the power of scholarship. Steinthal understands the matter completely differently. For him, the history of literature is a wholly aesthetic discipline: "eine ästhetische Disziplin; die Literaturgeschichte ist nur die Geschichte der eigentlichen Kunstdarstellungen auf dem Gebiete der Literatur."<sup>14</sup> Which works constitute the object of literary history? "Solche Werke, deren ganzes Wesen vollständig auf der Form beruht."<sup>15</sup> Historiography, oratory, philosophy—these enter the domain of literary history only insofar as they are distinguished by their refined form. On this basis Thucydides and Plato find themselves a place next to Homer and Sophocles; Kant and Fichte remain behind closed doors—or else are fitted into an addendum.

Of course, here we must take into account national peculiarities: Germans pay more attention to content than to form; for them, what is most important is the extraction of thought in whatever form it is expressed. As a result, no scholars on earth write as poorly as the Germans. The French are another matter; they respect proper style and therefore write well, and they continue even today to read Bossuet, whereas scarcely anyone in our time would tackle Herder, who in fact wrote well. As it is not clear what distinguishes scholars who write well from those who write poorly, the criterion for who will be admitted to literary history and who will not is likewise obscure. And what is the basis of admittance? Steinthal calls scholarly language "eine wissenschaftliche Notsprache" ["a scholarly language of expediency"], just as there exists the language of business and the language

of everyday conversation. Whether scholarly language is elegant or not, it will nevertheless remain *eine Notsprache*, even without all its specialized terms and erudite turns of phrase, if only because it is fundamentally conditioned by the content of research and the logical development of thought. If thought is not included in the exposition of the history of literature, then no matter how far its presentation surpasses ordinary academic *Notsprache* (as does, for example, the language of [Hermann] Lotze in his *Microcosm*), it will not enter the history of literature except perhaps as a special chapter—"Of Good Style."

We will leave it to others to decide: did Steinthal outline the boundaries of literary history too narrowly? For our part, we explain matters as follows. There is a rubric by the name of literary history: its boundaries are unclear, expanding from time to time to adopt elements that have become specialized fields. It was necessary to draw boundaries—to define how far the history of literature was allowed to go and where foreign proprietorship began. The alien territories are political history, the history of philosophy, of religion, of the hard sciences. As a result, what remains as the share portioned to literary history is only so-called belles lettres; [literary history] becomes an aesthetic discipline: the history of refined works of verbal art, or historical aesthetics. This is what one calls the legitimization and the effort to make sense [осмысление] of that which exists. Without a doubt, the history of literature can and should exist in this sense, replacing the stale theories of the beautiful and the lofty with which we have thus far been compelled to occupy ourselves.

And in the hands of Steinthal it would so remain. Still, his talent is necessary; we are afraid that in different hands the history of literature, taken in this direction, would always be theoretical or prove untrue to itself. Forgoing the desire to study exclusively poetic works, literary history will be compelled to explain them by resorting to the peculiarities



of their political and religious development. Gervinus's *Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung* offers much more than one could possibly expect from its title. Instead of leaving a cautionary loophole for ourselves, we would do better to acknowledge that the boundaries of literary history must sometimes be defined much more widely than as an exclusive selection of belles lettres. While we seek to make sense of the existing rubric, it is possible, I believe, to offer a new, alternative rubric. We have offered [such an alternative]: the history of cultural formation [образование], of culture, and of social thought insofar as it is expressed in poetry, science, and life. The hard sciences will be included, of course, only with their results; in any case, they have generally begun to influence culture only in recent times.

I am the first to admit that this task is not easy. One needs an abundance of knowledge and the time to acquire it—not the two years assigned to us by the decree of the Ministry [of Education]. One sometimes loses heart when faced with the mass of material that one hopes to master to be adequate even minimally to the task that one has set before oneself. For this, specialization is often required, but instead one must hasten and read as many books as possible. This explains why you sometimes find yourself scattered, attending many lectures that distract you from more productive studies at home. Currently, I am studying Old French at home, whereas at the university I am taking psychology with Jürgen Bona Meyer and two courses with [Karl] Müllenhoff: one on German historical grammar and another on Walther von der Vogelweide in relation to German metrics. [. . .]

Berlin, summer 1863

## EDITOR'S NOTES

1. Filaret, archbishop of Chernigov, *Обзор русской духовной литературы* (Kharkov, 1859–61).

2. *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, ed. Moritz Lazarus and Heymann Steinthal (1860–90).

3. Veselovsky refers to an episode in a widespread northern Russian lay on Svyatogor and Ilya Muromets, in which Svyatogor lies down in a gigantic coffin the two encounter on their travels and the younger богатырь (“epic hero”), Ilya Muromets, proves unable to remove the coffin’s lid. At the time, the text of the lay had appeared in print only once, in *Песни, собранные П. Н. Рыбниковым* (vol. 1; Moscow, 1861; 41–42), in an unusual variant in which Ilya declines to perform the imposition of the lid. The lay also circulated orally; see Konstantin Aksakov’s testimony in *Песни, собранные П. В. Киреевским* (vol. 1; Moscow, 1860; xxx–xxxi).

4. *Historische Zeitschrift* (1859–).

5. Veselovsky appears to refer to *De arte venandi cum avibus*, by Frederick II, and to the genre of Occitan didactic poem (*ensenhamen*), which some troubadour poets addressed to the jongleur.

6. Stepan Petrovich Shevyrev (1806–64) was Veselovsky’s teacher at Saint Petersburg University and one of the pioneers of the study of medieval Russian literature. In his *History of Russian Letters*, Shevyrev mentions that among the works and artifacts surviving from the period of the Kievan grand prince Yaroslav (d. 1054) is a “coin in his name with the inscription Ярославле серебро” (lecture 6, *История русской словесности* [vol. 1; Moscow, 1846; pt. 1; 11]).

7. Emil Ruth, *Geschichte der italienischen Poesie* (Leipzig, 1844–47).

8. Karl Biedermann, *Deutschlands geistige, sittliche und gesellige Zustände im 18. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1858). The review, signed “K.,” appeared in *Historische Zeitschrift* 1.1 (1859): 260–61.

9. Veselovsky paraphrases an episode from *Le couronnement de Louis* (12th cent.), narrating the exploits of William of Gellone. The quotation is on line 917.

10. English in the original.

11. “I therefore regard comparative grammar only as a branch of the comparative history of the culture of the entire national stock [of the Indo-Europeans]” (*Über die Wichtigkeit des Sanskrit-Studiums und seine Stellung an unseren Universitäten* [Breslau, 1863; 14]).

12. Gervinus: “des Alten.” The text of Veselovsky’s original publication reproduced in later editions has страны (“of the country”), most likely corrupted from старины (“of antiquity”) in the process of typesetting.

13. Georg Gervinus, *Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung* (vol. 1; Leipzig, 1853; 131).

14. “Literary history is only the history of artistic representations proper, [investigated] in the domain of literature.” The source of Veselovsky’s quotations from Steinthal has not been identified; they may derive from Veselovsky’s lecture notes.

15. “Such works whose entire being is fully dependent on form.”

## little-known documents

# The Birth of Belgian Surrealism: Excerpts from *Correspondance* (1924–25)

INTRODUCTION, TRANSLATION,  
AND COMMENTARY BY JAN  
BAETENS AND MICHAEL KASPER

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## Introduction

*CORRESPONDANCE* WAS A BELGIAN SURREALIST MAGAZINE, FROM THE EARLIEST YEARS OF THE MOVEMENT, THAT CAN BE READ AS A CHALLENGE to the notions of surrealism promoted in André Breton's *Manifesto of Surrealism* of 1924. It was a self-published periodical comprising twenty-two one-page tracts, written and distributed over seven months in 1924 and 1925 by three francophone Belgian writers, Paul Nougé, Camille Goemans, and Marcel Lecomte. The most important of these was undoubtedly the one who published least: Nougé, the intellectual leader of the Brussels surrealist group. In addition to scattered publications of startling originality throughout the 1920s and 1930s, he was at that time also a key promoter of René Magritte's art; at weekly meetings of the group (whose members had day jobs and could only gather on Sunday), Magritte's latest paintings were discussed, and Nougé, mostly, proposed their enigmatic titles.

The short, dense texts of *Correspondance* critiqued contemporary literary personalities, tendencies, and events: for instance, a public lecture in Brussels, the serialization of a novel by André Gide, or the publication of a questionnaire on modernism (an event that may have launched the whole enterprise). Each issue, a single sheet (A4 size, approximately 8¼ × 11¾ inches), was mailed to around a hundred recipients (not always the same list), thus making the project an early example of correspondence art or mail art: direct, anticommercial, inbred, and also visual, since the tracts were printed on and named for paper of different colors and were typeset, sometimes eccentrically, in a modernist font. *Correspondance* was also ahead of its time in its extensive use of literary collage; a line can be traced from Nougé's practice of plagiarizing and theorizing about plagiarism, throughout his career, through *détournement*, the situationist concept, to ideas of appropriation popular in writing of the past few decades. Since the archives of the periodical have been lost, the names of the recipients can only be guessed, but they certainly included major Parisian surrealist authors, such as Breton, Louis Aragon, and Paul Éluard, as well as other modernist writers, like Gide, Valéry Larbaud, and Jean Paulhan, the most important literary broker in France in

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the interwar period and the editor then of *La nouvelle revue française* (NRF).

In the absence also of any manifesto, the concrete mission of the *Correspondance* tracts must be inferred from close readings of the texts; it seems plausible to suppose that the authors' intention was to practice, if not invent, a new form of criticism that was more direct and more disquieting than previous forms, especially for those who were the objects of the *Correspondance* critiques. Throughout the series, the authors didn't merely express literary opinions; they hoped to develop a new way of using literature, as a means of cultural as well as political action. The relation between writing and action, and more generally between art and life, was of course a basic preoccupation of all the avant-gardes of the period, but the rejection of institutionalized literature and ways of publishing was stronger in Brussels than in, say, Paris, where Breton and his friends, after all, were deeply involved in the literary and fine arts marketplaces.

Like French surrealism, Belgian surrealism was profoundly marked by Dada and the revolutionary spirit of the post–World War I years. In other meaningful respects, though, these two surrealisms diverged. Belgian avant-garde culture has been routinely called surrealist ever since the 1920s, but the core of this movement—namely, the Brussels-based *Correspondance* group—remained ambivalent about the very word *surrealism* to the end.

From the start it was clear that the *Correspondance* authors had a distinct vision of surrealist writing and of the relation between literature and politics in the context of an intentionally revolutionary surrealism. On the one hand, the Brussels group adopted an especially rationalist stance toward the act of writing: it had to be the result of a lucid decision, a reaction to a stimulus, as efficient as possible. Hence their skepticism toward automatic writing (see *Red 16*), psychoanalysis, and the fascination with the occult and their refusal to pursue quasi-magical found objects (*objets trouvés*), like the ones in Breton's *Nadja* (1928). Instead of these, Nougé and his friends proposed “disruptive objects” (*objets bouleversants*)—consciously constructed texts, photographs, performances,

and paintings aiming to upend expectations. Prime examples are the nineteen amazing captioned photographs made by Nougé between 1929 and 1930, first published in 1968 and now more widely known from *La subversion des images*, a huge exhibit on surrealist film and photography at the Centre Georges Pompidou in 2010 (in fact, the show's title was borrowed from Nougé's title for those photos [Bajac and Chéroux]).

On the other hand, the Brussels group sought throughout the 1920s and 1930s to design and demonstrate a unique, utopian artistic program within a global revolutionary perspective. Close to the Communist Party and in later years sympathetic to Stalin (certainly in the case of Nougé), they tried to maintain a position that rejected autonomy as well as heteronomy: literature and visual art were not seen as autonomous arts (as in modernism), since their aim was to serve the revolution; but neither could they be heteronomous (as in the Parisian acceptance of party oversight), since any directly political instrumentalization of literature and art would inevitably entail a destruction of their revolutionary potential.

Though short-lived and low-profile, *Correspondance* was a subtly influential intervention in twentieth-century culture. It is little known nowadays—not surprising given its intentionally marginal publication history, its elliptical style and obscure content, and its origin far from Paris, the center of French writing—but worthy of wider recognition. The selection here attempts to provide a representative sample of the stylistic, rhetorical, and ideological tone of *Correspondance*, while suggesting as well, although many of its allusions are still open to rediscovery and interpretation, the way the periodical was intimately networked with the wider modernist scene of the mid-1920s.

We have followed the facsimile edited by Paul Aron (*Correspondance*), whose comments were indispensable during our translation. Finally, we would like to express our most sincere thanks to the copyright holders who generously authorized the publication of this translation: Pierrette Broodthaers and SABAM Belgium (for Nougé's writings) and Camille-Gregor Goemans (for Goemans's writings).

22 November 1924

# BLUE 1

## RESPONSE TO A QUESTIONNAIRE ON MODERNISM

- 1 One conquers the world, one dominates it, one uses it; thus, quiet and proud, a beautiful fish circles in this bowl.
- 2 One conquers the word, it dominates you, one is used; thus, quiet and proud . . .
- 3 Then a difficulty arises, so great is the pain of not understanding one another.

"With unforeseen words, on purpose

We ward off what's customary"

One might blush to recognize them trapped in the "passionate safety" of so wholesome a modernism.

Rest assured, they soar, still free.

- 4 Watching games of chess, or ball, or the seven arts may amuse us a bit, but the emergence of a new art is hardly our concern.  
Art, anyway, has been demobilized, what matters is to live.  
Rather, life, says the voice from across from us.  
We continue our stroll, releasing, as we go, a few differences from the snares we'd set.
- 5 It has become too easy now to find in all this nothing but a guilty use of space, of a moment, of our heart. It's a youthful vice that asserts itself when neglected. It threatens to blow us away.
- 6 Since there's still time to do so, we'll take our leave, if you don't mind.  
No doubt we'll be back -- elsewhere.

"Correspondance"

226, rue de Mérode, Brussels

PAUL NOUGÉ



## Commentary

The European avant-gardes between 1910 and 1930 extensively used dialogic literary genres—pamphlets, manifestos, questionnaires, agitprop interventions in the public or the semipublic sphere, performances, readings. Some of the best and most theoretically central work of that era was produced in these forms. Readers, viewers, and listeners were transformed from abstract entities into participants (sometimes willingly, sometimes not), and good art was that which succeeded in provoking an echo.

*Blue 1* is dated two weeks after the first issue in the 1924–25 series of *7 Arts*, the leading modernist weekly in Belgium then (and, incidentally, a week before the first issue, in Paris, of *La révolution surréaliste*). *7 Arts* had previously circulated a questionnaire on the international situation of modernism. Although the questionnaire has been lost, it is possible to infer from some of the answers that were published later in *7 Arts* that *Blue 1* is responding to this inquiry. Instead of answering the questions directly, though, Nougé is obscure. Apparently modest in leaving the initiative, the questioning, to others, he in fact adopts a more aggressive stance,

if subtly. By erasing the questions and playing with the answers, he perverts the logic of question and answer and turns his replies into interrogations.

Thus, according to the critic Paul Aron (*Correspondance*; “Les tracts” 178–79), answer 4 deforms and supplements the published response from the peripatetic modernist designer Friedrich Kiesler (1890–1965). In answer 3, the artist and scholar Marcel Mariën notes (59), Nougé intensifies the dialogue with *7 Arts* by quoting from Camille Goemans’s first poetry collection, *Périple*s, and from a sarcastic review of it in the recent issue of *7 Arts*, which describes Goemans’s work as exhibiting a “passionate safety.”

Nougé further challenges the normal, dialogic “contract” implicit in questionnaires by responding to an audience larger than the pollsters. He addresses not just the *7 Arts* group, whose modernism the *Correspondance* writers considered traditional, but also the Parisian surrealists (whom they also criticized, for different reasons), and a sure sign of that intention is that the tract’s last word—“elsewhere”—is also that of André Breton’s *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924).

20 January 1925

## WHITE 7

### SOCRATES'S DELIRIUM

Socrates: That's why, for the time being, I don't much care. Or, rather . . .

Phaedrus: Finish your sentence.

Socrates: "Finish" . . . you're right . . . though if there were still time left, wouldn't that be precisely the thing to avoid? To finish, Phaedrus, maybe one should say to finish off?

Phaedrus: Which demon is suddenly troubling you, Socrates, unlike your usual one?

Socrates: Oh too loyal Phaedrus!

Phaedrus: Oh most secretive of masters! What are you suggesting? Where are you leading me, with your exquisite speech, - and bewildering wisdom . . .

Socrates: May it bewilder you to the point of distrust. This dangerous speech, this dream of movement . . . Alas, even Socrates should mistrust it!

Phaedrus: Ah, cruel friend! You've reserved for me a second agony, a second death.

Socrates: Listen. Remember, these geometricians and their artificial or too material rigor; this phony elegance leading one figure to another, and even more, in order to finally choose the one that was longed for, whose image and all of whose reasons one possessed, - this feigned progress in which it is advantageous to discern naught but an equal and unsurprising return trip . . . well, Phaedrus? Isn't this how it failed invincibly, that which you imagined arising from my profound absences? Consider, Phaedrus, such pure spurting, which subsides, of course, and the fatal attraction. I've unveiled and affirmed: no geometry without words. Scant ecstasy; implacable, oh ravenous certainty! But who then might have notified me, Diocles's friend, that I would come to find strange all words that neither implied nor were imprisoned by some sort of geometry? So that at the end of . . .

Phaedrus: However, Socrates, following that example, your words have constructed something, they've created something, and knowledge . . . But I've lost track, Socrates . . .

Socrates: . . . at the end of my false adventure, and at what a ridiculously low price, didn't I dispose of everything one is supposed to achieve! Oh yes, knowledge and construction are thus unfortunately confounded; I built for myself, I locked myself in, blind as I was I went around and around in my roomful of words; and in this invisible prison, healed of my hazards, long before the hemlock . . .

Phaedrus: Stop, impious man, you've told the truth, your otherworldly speech-maker ominously burnishes our destitute shadows; for this reprehensible behavior, may the gods confound him, he who dictated to you those perfect architectural discourses . . .

Socrates: Too perfect, no doubt. But don't accuse him, imprisoned as he is, like you yourself, in the opaque clarity of his own speeches, forever a prisoner, -- like Socrates, when the one who is training him now abandons him for some unforeseen game, or for . . .

PAUL NOUGÉ

"Correspondance"

226, rue de Mérode, Brussels



## Commentary

Nougé had a high regard for Paul Valéry (1871–1945), the eminent poet and essayist, who played a paramount role in the dialogue between tradition and the avant-garde in the 1920s. Valéry's work, today somewhat hastily called neoclassic (or even retroclassic), reflected all the many ambiguities and ambivalences of its author and the crosscurrents of his time. One of Valéry's major traits, which no doubt influenced his initial sympathy for the surrealist movement in general and Breton in particular, was his "terrorism" (in the sense coined by Paulhan [*Les fleurs*]). A ruthless disparager of literary illusions (inspiration, identification, emotion, fictionality, etc.), Valéry was committed to a cerebral use of literature. Having begun his career with an essay on Leonardo da Vinci, he developed a strong interest in the analogies between science and literature, which he elaborated in diaries, essays, and literary creations.

In *White 7*, Nougé continues Valéry's "Eupalinos ou l'architecte" ("Eupalinos; or, The Architect"), the first of two Platonic dialogues published in Paris in 1923, revising and resituating phrases from the original. Mariën informs us that the size of Valéry's text, which contains 115,800 characters, had been arbitrarily imposed by the journal that had commissioned it (67). Nougé's intervention not only quotes and transforms lines from Valéry's text, in typical *Correspondance* fashion, but also *continues* it. This apparently simple strategy appears more complex as one realizes that the status of an artwork's final form and the relation between perfection and

closure are themes central to Valéry's text and Nougé's continuation.

In an in-depth analysis of *White 7*, Philippe Dewolf describes the shift from Valéry to Nougé:

The protagonists [of Valéry's piece] are Socrates and Phaedrus of Myrrinontes, who, both dead, meet again in the kingdom of shadows. Phaedrus recalls the reflections he exchanged with the architect Eupalinos of Megara. In "Eupalinos" Valéry affirms in a way the superiority of the artist over the philosopher as far as the capacity for achieving a definitive and thus finished form is concerned. Nougé would actually complete Valéry's dialogue by imagining *Socrates's Delirium*, which became the subject of the tract *White 7*. It consists of a series of thirteen exchanges, the first of which is in response to Phaedrus's final words in Valéry's "Eupalinos": "That's exactly what immortality is made of." To which Nougé answers, through his character Socrates, "That's why, for the time being, I don't much care." (11)

For Dewolf the philosophical and aesthetic dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus concerns most of all the problem of concluding: whereas Phaedrus is forever looking for closure, Socrates will resist it, pointedly refusing to finish his sentences . . . Dewolf further suggests that Nougé proposes an unusual Socrates, one closer to his Sophist enemies than we are used to, and thus indirectly but critically charges Valéry with speechifying and overstating distinctions between artists and philosophers.

10 March 1925

**PINK 12**

**SOME INQUIRIES INTO THE CONSCIENCE  
OF CONRAD'S HEROES**

One really can't help noticing that the manner in which Mr. Albert Saugère approaches Dostoevsky seems rude. At the least it's a solid approach, and one can doubt neither its benefits nor its range.

We may have the impression that Conrad's characters are created especially to attract interest, to be better known. Mr. Albert Saugère no doubt thinks so, since he knows those of Dostoevsky so well.

"Conrad always reserves for feeling a sense of disquiet, which shows responsibility, contrary to most novelists, who are tempted to ascribe to feelings an irresponsible face."

"These heroes would lack nothing if they didn't lack themselves. Consequently, the plane of agony is displaced . . ."

And thus one can take pleasure, a curious pleasure perhaps, in making contact with so much otherness. But with such a sensation, wouldn't it also be a matter of excessive clairvoyance? One is well versed in embarrassment.

**MARCEL LECOMTE.**

"Correspondance"

226, rue de Mérode, Brussels



## Commentary

The December 1924 issue of the *NRF* is an homage to Joseph Conrad, who had died that summer. A contribution by Albert Saugère compares Conrad and Dostoevsky, focusing on character development in ways Lecomte, hostile to psychological criticism, found ridiculous.

Throughout the series, there is a difference in tone and thus in meaning between Lecomte's evaluations and those of Nougé and Goemans. Lecomte's style is less dense than theirs, and his general preoccupations seem less political. Such differences may explain his eventual exclusion from the group.

Typical of Lecomte, *Pink 12* is pedestrian and unprovocative. In an interview, Mariën provides a portrait of Lecomte that is reveal-

ing on this point. Having explained Lecomte's presence in the *Correspondance* group by his early interest in Dadaism and surrealism, Mariën stresses Lecomte's old-fashioned poetical stance:

[H]e lived his poems. He was inside his poems. He wrote poems, he published them, he corrected them, then republished them. . . . He lived intensely. He was a poet who believed himself something other than a poet. Imagine, a poet in the full professional sense of the word, one who is interested in nothing but poetry. That was the kind of poet he was. Yet at the same time he thought he was something else. Linked to the mysteries of the universe.

(qtd. in Bussy 173)

20 March 1925

WHITE 13

ABOUT A DEATH,  
THE LIVING, AND THE DEAD

“ . . . the affirmation of this psychological positivism,  
of this modern classicism . . . ”

from the start, they're planning to give us the sensation of disgrace without cure. From every angle, they watch whatever tries to escape disaster, they require, apparently, that nothing remain that doesn't resemble a corpse. Already they're describing, “bearing witness to” — a tomb they're seemingly sealing up.

By dint of these sudden brutalities, and the loathing one can taste in them, perhaps we should, with a little less rancor, distinguish a comedic manner: a few who are nothing but rude corpses, noisy, and who surround and celebrate the sad simulacrum they just erected.

They're pleased to recognize it. To recognize themselves. Thus they condemn themselves, with a severity that relieves us of the obligation to intervene.

We return to the one who managed to defend himself against their approach, and to ourselves, whom we sense to be troubled, surprised in the act of catching him at the end of a string of abstract thoughts, for want of two or three certainties. He got away from them nonetheless, incapable as they were of conjuring an interior debate wherein we'd want to meet him at his best. But these getaways, these returns, will we deplore his failure to secure all the benefits that one supposes they have?

“Understanding oneself and understanding mankind are the only occupations that give meaning to life.” He never stops banging his head against this illusory obstacle.

Hence, a game so badly played that one thought it lost — but so much care taken to safeguard his meager opportunity, and such firmness of scruples and diligence,

we must eventually admit how deeply his activities touch us and the dangers he exposes while thus brushing past his end.

That he gets really lost, how can one believe that? How can one neglect an adventure that's constantly on the verge of routing and confounding the intellectual tracery with which he dreams of besieging it, of announcing its unfolding.

Would we consent to death's depriving us of those who permit us to hold out hope for some surprise, some serious menace?

PAUL NOUGÉ.

“Correspondance”  
226, rue de Mérode, Brussels



## Commentary

*White 13* is Nougé's commemoration of Jacques Rivière (1886–1925), writer, critic, and editor of the *NRF*, who had just died. The tract anticipates the homage in the April issue of the *NRF* that had been announced in March by Paulhan, who had replaced Rivière. Paulhan's editorial ends with the words "Understanding oneself and understanding mankind are the only occupations that give meaning to life" ("Jacques Rivière" 259).

In addition to Paulhan, Nougé quotes Benjamin Crémieux (1888–1944)—literary critic at the *NRF*, where Crémieux had just

published the first study on Proust—while expressing contempt for what Dewolf calls the "necrophiliac celebrations" surrounding Rivière's premature death (16). The rejection of personality cults is a recurrent trait in Nougé's work and life and one of the main causes of tension between the Parisian and Brussels surrealists. And in *White 13*, by nodding to the classical (Rivière) and the modern (Paulhan), as well as the avant-garde (Breton, although not explicitly named here, was certainly one of the addressees), Nougé demonstrated that evenhandedness and refusal to worship idols.

30 March 1925

## BEIGE 14

### ABOUT A CONCEPT FROM MR. VALERY LARBAUD

"There is the expression of a much felt sensation, the result of an experiment done often by many of us . . ."

it seems as if one has reason to fear such an encounter, since even so much happiness can't stop Logan Pearsall Smith's pretty poem in its tracks. With what curious embarrassment it is mixed, with what weight a delicate thought is weakened:

one imagines the fresh air of freedom, the color of the sentiment that would see it relieve itself of that burden.

Mr. Valery Larbaud's fortune depends on all this, or seems to, as does the reader's (this ideal reader whom he follows through every ordeal)

and this promised land, this land of dreams they reach together. So much so that one doubts, now that one knows it so well, now that one is actually touching its boundaries, whether it's necessary or even possible to see in it anything but a kind of reflection, the real face of departure.

Thus, certain differences, this gulf separating reader from author: it deepens from so many habits, and one experiences their disappointing effects.

Wherever one still feels pleased to believe oneself covered by them, one walks half naked. In truth, they lay bare some secret delusion, the lapse of those accustomed to placing undeserved confidence in the ordinary resources of the mind.

Yet they gain an immobile air from it, the vanity of conversation, and this mediocre taste for a life led by halves to consent to death.

CAMILLE GOEMANS.

"Correspondance"  
226, rue de Mérode, Brussels



## Commentary

Valéry Larbaud (1881–1957) was a poet, novelist, and translator, a key figure in European modernism, thanks not only to his works—poetry, essays, and fiction—but also to his exceptional commitment to exchange among European literatures. He was an editorial adviser for the *NRF* and himself editor of several important journals, among them *Commerce* (1924–32, with Paul Valéry and Léon-Paul Fargue as coeditors). Heir to an immense fortune, he lived a life of luxury, but also of poor health, in spas in Italy and Spain.

Among many other works, he wrote a celebrated essay entitled “Ce vice impuni, la lecture” (“That Unpunished Vice, Reading,”

published in *Commerce* in summer 1924), which Goemans here quotes at the outset and then proceeds to debate. Goemans denounces, among other things, the pseudo-proximity of author and reader, one of the salient traits of Larbaud’s poetics. Larbaud thought of his writings as conversations or correspondence with his (bourgeois) readers. Many of his works are epistolary in form.

Larbaud’s essay title, “Ce vice impuni, la lecture,” is a phrase from *Trivia* (1902), a collection of short prose by the Anglo-American author Logan Pearsall Smith (1865–1946), published in a French version in 1921 (with an introduction by Larbaud).

20 April 1925

RED 16

## REFLECTIONS, SOTTO VOCE

For A. B.

The mistrust that writing inspires in us never ceases to get mixed up most curiously with a sense of its virtues, which we can't help acknowledging. There's no doubt that it possesses a singular aptitude for keeping us in that fertile zone, in danger, repeatedly in peril, the only place where we can hope to live.

Every day one remarks the way in which writing can guarantee the endless state of war we must maintain within us, around us.

We owe to mistrust in writing our extreme experiences of temptation, as well as certain means for keeping it in check.

This precarious turn, this equivocal approach, a cunning humility, -- is there any other reason to stay faithful to it?

. . . One can act in such a way as to believe here in a breach of trust, in the customary cruelties of a language invoked naively.

One might imagine an essential doubt arising, and an urge to grab hold of oneself, as of an object, so as to be reassured of one's own existence. At that moment the most secret intentions must emerge, those determined by precious uncertainties. It's mildly reassuring to undertake an inner voyage as in a world of immobile forms and colors. Soon none of them can fail to be recognized. Finally one stops when everything is named, when one can reread oneself like a page of writing.

If the tragedy that one suspected passes these obstinately pursed lips, if it plays out at last in the deceptive light of unreserved confessions, how then can one not be moved?

Surprise of the sort offered by language, some ill-conceived habit might intervene.

Should we be thinking about unlucky audacity, about revolts with no future?

"Words have a way of being grouped according to particular affinities whose general effect is to make them re-create the world on its old model."

Still, such clairvoyance is proof, no doubt, of some profound, unforeseeable rupture.

PAUL NOUGÉ.

"Correspondance"

226, rue de Mérode, Brussels



## Commentary

“A. B.,” the dedicatee, is André Breton. For many commentators on *Correspondance*, among them Mariën, this is one of the most significant tracts of the series.

It was first closely analyzed in 1984 by Léon Somville, who points to the disagreement over automatic writing as the main cause of dissension between the Parisian and Brussels surrealists, an assessment nowadays accepted by most scholars. In his reading, Somville follows a double thread. On the one hand, he identifies what he calls “machination” (417), a strategy in which Nougé sets a trap for meaning in order to consciously, purposefully generate new meanings. On the other hand, Somville defines Nougé’s main

rhetorical device as an ironic quotation that twists the sense of its source.

Near the end of *Red 16*, Nougé quotes from Breton’s essay on dream objects, “Introduction au discours sur le peu de réalité” (“Introduction to a Discourse on the Paucity of Reality,” first published in *Commerce* in summer 1924), but in such a way that Breton’s sentence, originally part of a defense of automatic writing, can as well be read as a rationale for Nougé’s (and Brussels surrealism’s) alternative method of constructing disturbing verbal objects, with intention. Breton and Nougé later returned to the debate on automatic writing, the latter to reiterate his position, the former to nuance his.

30 April 1925

PINK 17

TO DIE OF NOT DYING  
BY PAUL ELUARD

One imagines Paul Eluard discovering himself in his poems, finding in a close relationship with words the power to defend himself against them, and with what movement, with what intensity, poetry takes form for him. In such a way that one notices much more how his efforts clear a path, pierce the blinding burst of words, discard what tends to separate him from himself, and from us. If he remains an unblemished crystal that some cannot, at least, or dare not look at without emotion, it is nevertheless the case that no shadow is cast through it onto his character, except theirs, which could quickly disfigure it.

From such a set of sentiments, it would perhaps be hazardous to infer the effects of his constructions. And we don't make such poems together, nor, it seems, by virtue of some inverted operation.

One supposes that only fatigue, or maybe an accident, could put an end to any discovery here, could bury what Paul Eluard considers poetry, mysterious, genuine, eternal.

Wherein one recognizes an opinion astonishing for its simplicity, at the same time as a certain capital scorn, and the danger there might be, one day, of clearly distinguishing them.

Thus, certain preoccupations, a current of anxiety, if, however, one doesn't take care of a more direct concern about the future, about a slightly brutal return to the past, it will probably happen that one will precede them with an observation so perfect that tact will demand its correction later. And one should bear in mind the ravenous haste of certain souls, the state of indifference they can attain all at once, it seems . . .

CAMILLE GOEMANS.

"Correspondance"  
226, rue de Mérode, Brussels



## Commentary

*Mourir de ne pas mourir* (“To Die of Not Dying”) is the title of a collection of poems by Paul Éluard, published in 1924. Goemans here follows one of Nougé’s challenges to Breton with his own critique of an-

other leading Parisian surrealist. The attack against “transparency” can be read as a continuation of *Red 16*’s refutation of automatic writing. The tone, however, is less provocative than Nougé’s.

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## little-known documents

# Middlebrow Culture in the Cold War: Books USA Advertisements, 1967

INTRODUCTION BY  
TRYSH TRAVIS

TRYSH TRAVIS is an associate professor in the Center for Women's Studies and Gender Research at the University of Florida, specializing in the gendered histories of books and medicine. Her first book, *The Language of the Heart* (U of North Carolina P, 2009), told the story of the 12-Step recovery movement through its print culture. This article is drawn from her work in progress "Reading Matters: Books, Bookmen, and the American Century, 1930–1980."

## Introduction

IN THE DECADES FOLLOWING WORLD WAR II, AMERICANS WHO BELIEVED IN THE BOOK'S TRANSFORMATIVE POWER ENJOYED SHARING THEIR literary wealth with readers in the developing world. Through the Darien Book Aid Project (founded in 1949), The Freedom House Bookshelf (founded in 1958), Books USA (BUSA; founded in 1962), and other programs, they sent bundles of American paperbacks to would-be readers in countries where books were scarce and expensive. Such experiments in what international-relations scholars call people-to-people diplomacy aimed to harness the energies of America's growing middlebrow reading public to the nation's Cold War aims.

Book-donation programs shared the realist aesthetic and humanist sensibility that hallmarked the Book-of-the-Month Club (BOMC). Disdaining avant-garde "difficulty," their selections foregrounded transparent language, traditional mimesis, and strong themes. Fiction, biography, and popular history were the backbone of such programs, and even selections from sociology and political thought centered on unambiguous, three-dimensional characters—individuals who embodied the Enlightenment virtues of rational thought, hard work, and tolerance.

But if they favored realist aesthetics and liberal politics over the avant-garde and radical, book-donation programs' worldviews were not unnuanced. Excepting the occasional volume showcasing American humor, literary selections reflected the contemporary critical establishment's interest in irony and moral ambiguity: the nineteenth century was represented by anthologies of Emerson, Dickinson, and Whitman and novels by Hawthorne, Melville, and Twain. Twentieth-century selections ranged more widely, featuring poetry by Frost and Millay and fiction by not only Hemingway, Steinbeck, and Wolfe but also James Agee, James Baldwin, John O'Hara, and Katharine Ann Porter. Jan Radway has argued that in the BOMC it was less the substance of the texts than the readers' perceptions of the act of reading that created "middlebrowness," and the same dynamic animated book-donation programs. Book donors sought "to be expanded and challenged" by books and to use them as "link[s] between social worlds" (102, 117). Books had improved and expanded their own lives, so it made sense to assist others with similar aspirations.

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Edward R. Murrow founded BUSA in 1962 during his term as director of the United States Information Agency (USIA). BUSA incorporated as a nonprofit after a few months but retained some ties to USIA until 1966, when the agency informed the BUSA board of directors that the program wasn't "considered a valuable asset . . . at present" (A. R. Edwards; letter to S. Massey; 7 Mar. 1966; box 90, folder 1; TS).<sup>1</sup> This crisis prompted the organization to ask Franklin Spier, a New York firm specializing in book advertising, to create a campaign that would spur the public to donate money.

The original plan focused on the threat of what Murrow (referring to John F. Kennedy's invocation of the Cold War "missile gap") called "the book gap" in the developing world, and was unified by the tagline "for every one of ours, they send four" (draft BUSA ad; n.d. [c. Jan. 1966]; box 89, folder 5; pasteup). But the BUSA staff disliked the direct parallel of their work to Soviet propaganda. They pushed instead for ads with a positive and classically middlebrow message: the power of serious literature to effect personal transformation.

The resulting series retained the concept of the book gap but sought to close it with a discourse that mixed pride in America's intellectual heritage with humanitarian imperatives. Three ads engaged the reader with images of Abraham Lincoln, Kennedy, or both, framed by the rhetorical question "Your kind of ambassador(s)?" Readers were urged to "send their words abroad"—implicitly as a corrective to Soviet misrepresentations. When they engaged directly with the writings of these exemplars of progressive American values, as well as other "outstanding books," readers in "underdeveloped" countries would pierce the propaganda veil and realize what the United States was really about. A fourth ad depicted the idealized recipient of these transformative works: a young black man whose wire-rimmed spectacles connote intelligence and whose "tribal" dress suggests a nationalist bent.

The ads' underlying assumption was that such readers existed and wanted more knowledge about American values. All four characterized the developing world as "book-hungry," its inhabitants in need of "food for thought." In this they bor-

rowed from the food drives made ubiquitous in the mid-1960s by CARE and Save the Children. Significantly, however, BUSA's campaign rejected the feminized "Madonna-and-waif" imagery that characterized humanitarian-aid solicitations aimed at the liberal middle class (Briggs; Klein). Instead, as the focus on the male authors Kennedy and Lincoln suggests and as the ad showing the African reader makes plain, "the people who need [books] most" were intelligent and cosmopolitan men of color, more provocative than pathetic. The imperative to give to them was rooted not in ideals of the human family but in middlebrow intellection, specifically the pleasure of bridging social difference through reading.

The image of the idealized African reader was carefully constructed. Responding to an earlier mock-up that showed the man bareheaded, Suskia Massey, BUSA's executive director, argued that he "should wear a Nigerian cap, or turban, or one of those exotic fez-like things. . . . That would make it even more apparent that he is an African" (letter to Richard Cook; 11 Feb. 1966; box 89, folder 5; TS). Establishing Africanness was essential: Soviet propaganda depicting American racism had found a particularly receptive audience in Africa—the evocation of Lincoln and Kennedy was an attempt to create a counternarrative. The reason "[h]e's probably heard about the Ku Klux Klan," the ad proclaims, is because "[o]ther world powers know the impact of books" and were already using them to shape the contours of the postcolonial world.

But BUSA promised that propaganda's power need not be absolute. If the "exotic fez-like thing" and robe were meant to connote a potentially anti-Western nationalism, the man's glasses and his direct gaze suggested a willingness and ability to engage in rational dialogue. Here was someone different but not wholly other; like the donor, he used books to expand his mind. "[I]ntroduc[ing] him to Abraham Lincoln" and other works of "the best" American literature, therefore, could counter the insidious influence of Soviet propaganda, shifting his allegiance away from a dubious, communist-inflected nationalism toward the thoughtful transnational community of bespectacled booklovers.

The USIA was probably correct about BUSA's limited value to American interests abroad. The group received around 100,000 requests for book packets annually, but over its lifetime (1962–67) distributed only about 23,800—a drop in the bucket considering the Soviets gave away around four million volumes each year (“Final Report”; box 90, folder 3; TS). Nevertheless, scores of testimonials from book recipients note the life-changing effects of the books they received. And when USIA abruptly terminated BUSA's operations (just as the ad campaign began to attract donations), equal numbers of supporters wrote in to express their outrage. The gift of books made possible a feeling of connection that mattered greatly to donors and recipients, if not to the bureaucracy that collected and distributed the books or to geopolitics generally.

Programs like BUSA operated on the intimate scale typical of middlebrow culture. They promised intelligent and status-conscious readers a unique opportunity to encounter the developing world—and, possibly, to change it—through a gesture of generosity that also demonstrated critical acumen. This gesture was political: the ad featuring the African reader notes it would “help win friends for the United States.” But the largest motivation for giving, articulated in the copy's last lines, was that “you” too might win friends through the gift of books. The statement poignantly acknowledges the limitations that politics, geography, and national identity placed on the lives of the curious and somewhat insecure Americans who made up

the middlebrow reading public. It also suggests the means through which that public was drafted into the service of the cultural Cold War.

## NOTES

The images that follow are duplicates of the pasteups for the “ambassador” ad campaign developed by the Franklin Spier executive Raymond Cook with input from Suskia Massey, executive director of Books USA, in February 1966. They represent the second attempt at creating the ads. In the one featuring the African man, the agency has responded to Massey's request for a hat but neglected to make a word change that she asked for, hence the proofreading mark visible in the image.

1. All archival citations refer to the Freedom House Records, Public Policy Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

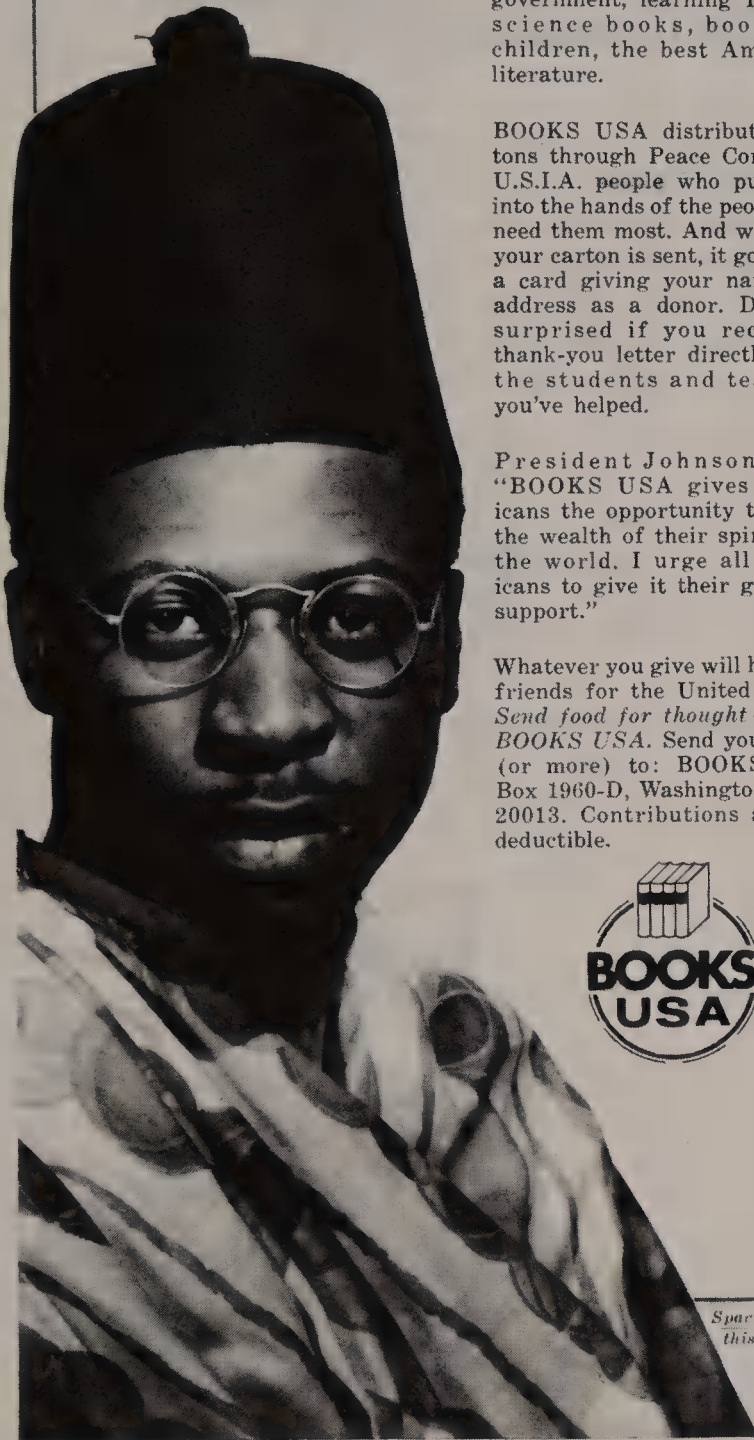
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**He's probably  
heard about  
the Ku Klux Klan.**

**For \$4, you can  
introduce him to  
Abraham Lincoln.**



Other world powers know the impact of books. They send book-hungry readers in underdeveloped parts of the world millions of volumes that tell their side of the story. That's why Ed Murrow started BOOKS USA, a private, non-profit educational program to help close "the book gap."

For each \$4.00 you contribute, a carton of ten carefully selected paperbacks is sent overseas. Books on understanding America, American history and government, learning English, science books, books for children, the best American literature.

BOOKS USA distributes cartons through Peace Corps and U.S.I.A. people who put them into the hands of the people who need them most. And wherever your carton is sent, it goes with a card giving your name and address as a donor. Don't be surprised if you receive a thank-you letter directly from the students and teachers you've helped.

President Johnson says: "BOOKS USA gives Americans the opportunity to share the wealth of their spirit with the world. I urge all Americans to give it their generous support."

Whatever you give will help win friends for the United States. *Send food for thought — Send BOOKS USA.* Send your \$4.00 (or more) to: BOOKS USA, Box 1960-D, Washington, D. C. 20013. Contributions are tax deductible.



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Fabian Bachrach

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It's in your power to send his words abroad. Your \$4 sends John F. Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage*, and nine other carefully chosen American paperbacks, to underdeveloped, book-hungry countries where these books can do the most good. You may also choose to send other cartons of 10 outstanding books in a variety of subject areas—understanding America, history, learning English, science, books for children, and literature.

Ed Murrow started BOOKS USA to help close "the book gap." President Johnson says: "I urge all Americans to give BOOKS USA their generous support."

Answer the President's appeal; send book cartons abroad in your name. *Send food for thought. Give to BOOKS USA.*



Fabian Bachrach



Box 1960-B,  
Washington, D. C. 20013  
I want BOOKS USA to  
send overseas in my  
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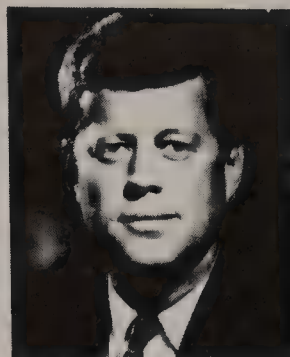
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## Forum

### Early Modern Sexualities: Two Views

#### TO THE EDITOR:

I began reading “‘Use Me But as Your Spaniel’: Feminism, Queer Theory, and Early Modern Sexualities” (127.3 [2012]: 493–511), by Melissa E. Sanchez, anticipating an account of what we know about early modern sexualities. I soon realized what a more attentive reading of the title suggests: that the essay is an account of what we know—and don’t know—about early modern women’s sexualities as a function of conflicts between feminism and queer theory. These conflicts, Sanchez argues, brought into public contention the way an influential strain of second-wave feminism had minimized and sanitized the general norms of women’s sexual desire that are acceptable and “healthy”—effacing lust, abjection, violence, the desire for excess, the unequal distribution of power, the use of pain to experience pleasure—and in the same spirit had bowdlerized the evidence of early modern women’s sexualities. To restore this evidence, Sanchez elicits from texts by Spenser and Shakespeare a rich array of representations of different- and same-sex desires and behaviors that go far beyond the sexual norms that, she maintains, have been projected back onto the past.

In making this argument Sanchez raises questions of real interest to me. But the focus of her project is dictated by the political encounters in which she frames it, and her implied readership is principally interested in the sex wars of the 1980s and their aftermath. Sanchez’s actual readers, however, are MLA members, a more heterogeneous group that includes no doubt some of the essay’s implied readers but also many who have a tangential relation to those encounters and who read Sanchez’s article to learn more about early modern studies, the history of sexuality, or some combination of these.

My contribution to the Forum aims to address these actual readers, especially if they finished reading Sanchez’s essay hungry for more

*PMLA* invites members of the association to submit letters that comment on articles in previous issues or on matters of general scholarly or critical interest. The editor reserves the right to reject or edit Forum contributions and offers the *PMLA* authors discussed in published letters an opportunity to reply. Submissions of more than one thousand words are not considered. The journal omits titles before persons’ names and discourages endnotes and works-cited lists in the Forum. Letters should be e-mailed to [pmlaforum@mla.org](mailto:pmlaforum@mla.org) or be printed double-spaced and mailed to *PMLA* Forum, Modern Language Association, 26 Broadway, 3rd floor, New York, NY 10004-1789.



knowledge about early modern sexualities or, like me inattentive to its specific project, disappointed by the implication that there's nothing more to learn. In fact there's a great deal more to learn. An enormous amount of research has been published in the last three decades by literary and nonliterary scholars who may or may not be feminist, queer, or both but whose work falls outside the boundaries of the sex wars. There also have been efforts to bring together and synthesize this work to attain a schematic but comprehensive sense of how from 1675 to 1725 there occurred a revolution in the conception and practice of sexuality that in its concrete historicity achieved the transformation that we normally attribute to the period from 1875 to 1925. This research also illuminates much that seems unaccountable, or invisible, when the story of early modern sexuality is confined to what Sanchez tells us about the feminist-queer encounter and to her own helpful readings of Spenser and Shakespeare.

To summarize: before roughly 1700, women were thought to be by nature the lustful sex, desiring sex rather than simply needing protection from it. Marriage was the arena of "generation," for which vaginal penetration was mandatory, and in this sense conjugal cross-sex was therefore "normative." But more commonly—hence "normatively"—sex was likely to be a collective and semipublic affair, including masturbation as well as the broad range of non-penetrative acts of petting, fondling, bundling, and the like that modern discourse consigns to the status of "foreplay."

Elite men displayed their power and masculinity through the penetration of women and young male commoners (in political contexts, "pederasty," a political rather than a sexual act), groups that for this purpose occupied the same category of subjection. "Gender difference" didn't exist. The anatomical differences between women and mature men were obvious and taken for granted as signs not of their fundamental difference but of their respective inferiority and superiority along the same continuum. Moreover, these physical differences were embedded in a complex experiential network of sociocultural practices that

subordinated what we think of as "natural" difference. Sex as such—an indwelling, biologically grounded conception of the self as well as the abstract category by virtue of which that conception made sense—didn't exist. In other words, early modern people experienced their sexuality as not sex but gender: as a "social construction," but without any sense of an alternative, contrasting determinacy.

By the early eighteenth century, biological sex had entered into a process of disembedding, becoming in time the fundamental criterion of personal identity. In their emergent difference from men, women ceased to be associated with concupiscence, and femininity slowly began to acquire its nineteenth-century character of dispassionate ethical subjectivity. Masculinity began to require that men feel sexual desire only for women. A male subculture defined by exclusive same-sex object choice coalesced as a functional correlate to the biologically male and female genders, a sort of third gender that bestowed on masculinity and femininity a differential coherence achieved through a mediating category that was at once both and neither.

This bald summary schematizes a historical transformation that was a major component of the transition to modernity. To speak more accurately, the early modern period should be seen not as the singular "before" to a singular "after" but as part of a chronological process that transpires in the space between before and after.

To learn more about this transformation, *PMLA*'s readers might start with the proceedings of a 2009 symposium held at Rutgers University, "Before Sex: The Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Sexuality Hypothesis" (*Signs* 37.4 [2012]: 791–848). Elsewhere I have expanded this hypothesis and coordinated it with a broad range of other developments to advance a comprehensive understanding of the transition to modernity in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England (*The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* [Johns Hopkins UP, 2005]).

Michael McKeon  
Rutgers University, New Brunswick

*Reply:*

I am grateful that Michael McKeon took the time to respond to my essay, and I have profited from reflecting on his comments. I am honored that a scholar of McKeon's stature has taken the publication of my essay as an occasion to steer readers toward his own important work. I agree with McKeon that his work, along with others', has uncovered vital knowledge of historical transformations in the organization of sexuality. Like many people, I have admired and learned from this body of scholarship.

But McKeon takes exception to my essay on the grounds of what I do not discuss rather than the actual positions I take, and his objections entail a mischaracterization of my scope and purpose. I therefore want to start with a brief overview of my argument before responding to what McKeon sees as my delinquency in citing his and others' work.

In my essay I argued that in focusing almost exclusively on nurturing and egalitarian female same-sex relations, early modern studies of female queerness have overlooked a range of alternative sexual fantasies and practices. I further proposed that this limited definition of queerness derives from an unspoken adherence to strains of feminism that see not only heterosexuality but any eroticization of power as incompatible with feminist aims. By tracing the methodological legacy of the sex wars, I hoped to make explicit some of the assumptions that have haunted early modern studies and to reintegrate insights of queer theory into analyses of female sexuality. Taking as examples two sixteenth-century texts, Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590) and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (c. 1594–96), I examined early modern representations of female rivalry, group sex, zoophilia, and masochism to demonstrate that acts and fantasies that have nothing to do with the gender of object choice can contest past and present structures of what we now call normativity.

McKeon is undoubtedly right that my essay did not interest all members of the MLA. But it is a misrepresentation to say that my "implied readership is principally interested in the sex wars of the 1980s and their aftermath"—unless the "aftermath" to which McKeon refers is the past three decades of feminist and queer work, hardly a narrow field. A partial list of theorists I draw on includes Eve Sedgwick, Gayle Rubin, Judith Butler, Leo Bersani, Michael Warner, Laurent Berlant, Lee Edelman, Jonathan Goldberg, and David Halperin, all of whom have had a profound impact on approaches to literature, gender, and sexuality. I think that many scholars would be as surprised as I was to hear the ongoing debates in feminist and queer theory impatiently dismissed as the parochial "aftermath" of decades-old skirmishes.

Even more troubling is McKeon's complaint that "the focus of her project is dictated by the political encounters in which she frames it" and his consequent supposition that my essay has left the "actual readers" of *PMLA* "disappointed" and "hungry for more knowledge about early modern sexualities." In contrasting the insubstantial amuse-bouche of theory and politics with the more nourishing fare of true scholarship, McKeon invokes the fantasy of a scholar who is outside politics, an ideological construct frequently used to elevate "real" intellectual work above crude "identity politics." He thereby shrugs off a key insight developed by studies of gender, sexuality, race, class, colonialism, and globalization: *all* historical and literary studies do political work, whether these studies conserve or contest dominant values—and whether they own up to their politics or not.

In response to McKeon's complaint that I exclude important knowledge about the history of sexuality, I want first to note that the works to which he redirects "disappointed" readers focus on the period (in his own account) "from 1675 to 1725." Normally, I wouldn't quibble over dates: a rigid chronology can obscure both the



complexity of early modern sexuality and the interplay of dominant, emergent, and residual discourses across traditional period divides. But in this case I think it's fair to observe that the specific history I leave out postdates the texts I discuss by nearly a century.

More to the point, far from making historical research "invisible," as McKeon claims, I include work on the history of sexuality in the medieval and Renaissance periods by Carolyn Dinshaw, James Schultz, Karma Lochrie, Jeffrey Cohen, Valerie Traub, Alan Bray, Bruce Smith, and Jeff Masten, to name just a few. This work complicates the narrative McKeon outlines in his response, one in which nothing much happened "before roughly 1700." But the absence of explicit engagement with scholarly canons of periods outside one's own should not be treated as intellectual parochialism. Rather than fight over what is most interesting and consequential, I hope that readers of a generalist journal like *PMLA* will look to individual essays as imaginative starting points for conversations that cut across period and methodological boundaries, even as they acknowledge the limits imposed by

the specializations that organize the academy. No one can write the key to all mythologies.

Finally, McKeon charges that I suggest that "there's nothing more to learn" about early modern sexualities. To the contrary, I ended my essay with the hope that more methodological self-consciousness "can expand not only the scope of queer studies but also the potential for feminist studies to incorporate affects and desires that historically have been seen as a source of female shame and disempowerment" (506). The history of sexuality is essential to this project: the more we learn about past practices, values, and fantasies, the more we are compelled to reconsider present truisms about what is normal or healthy. I agree with McKeon that theoretical work that ignores history may miss vital transformations. I hope he can agree with me that if we don't reflect on our own methodological and political orientations, we might overlook the extent to which those orientations shape our assessments of what counts as worthwhile scholarship in the first place.

*Melissa E. Sanchez*  
University of Pennsylvania

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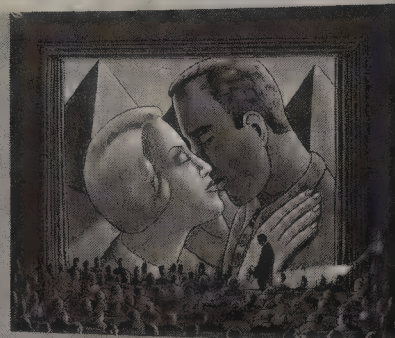
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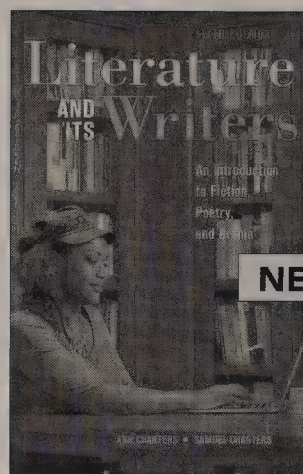
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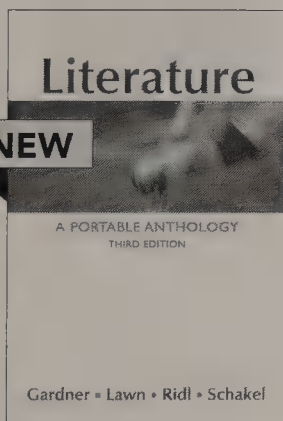


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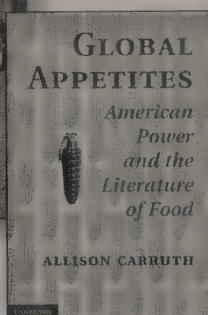
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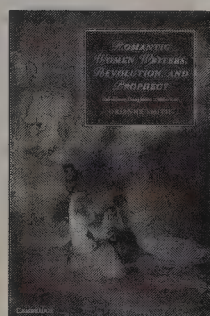
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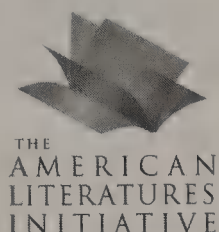
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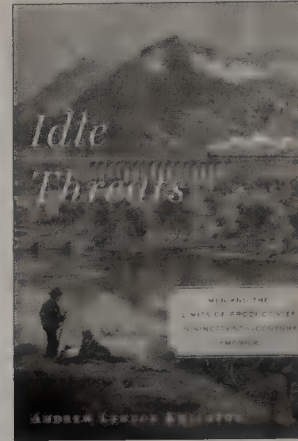
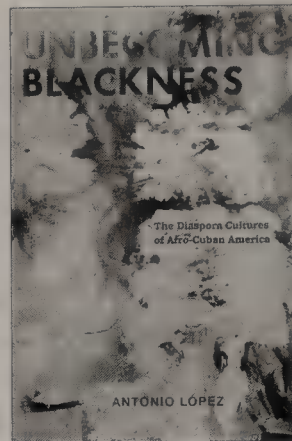
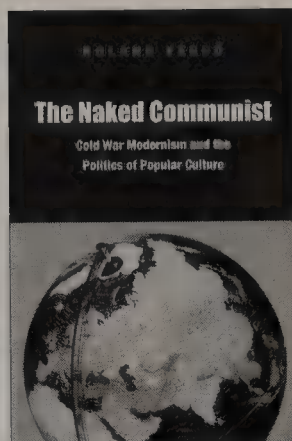
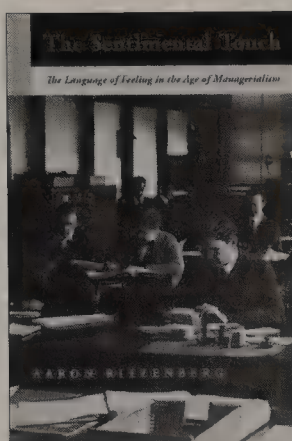
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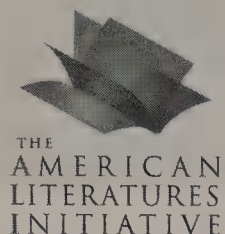
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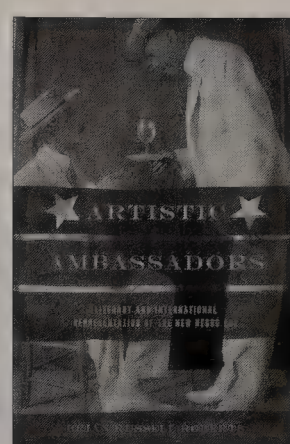
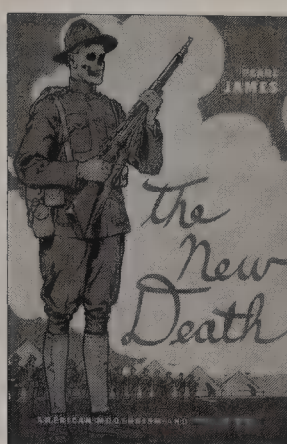
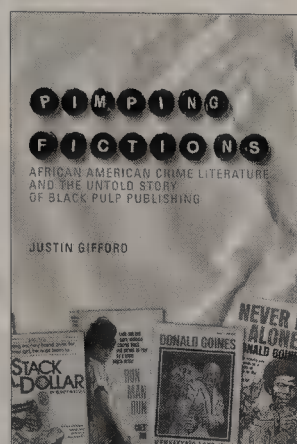
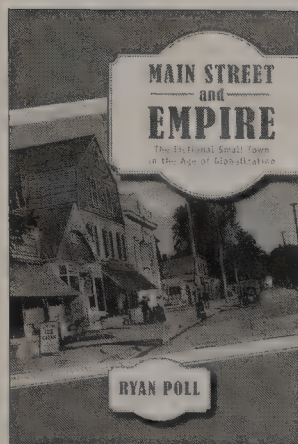
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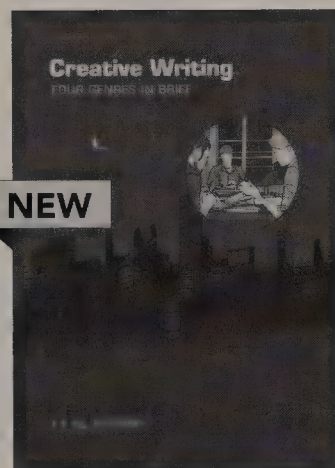


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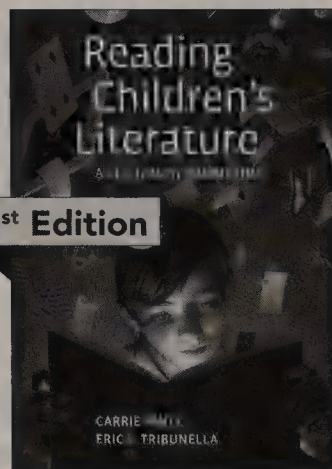


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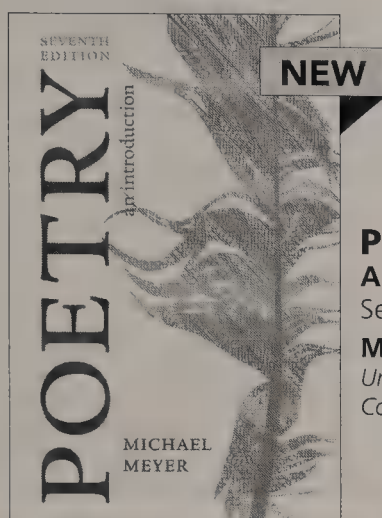
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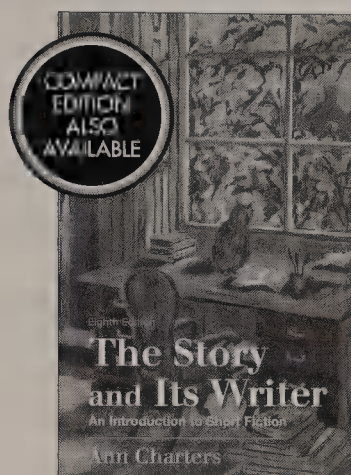
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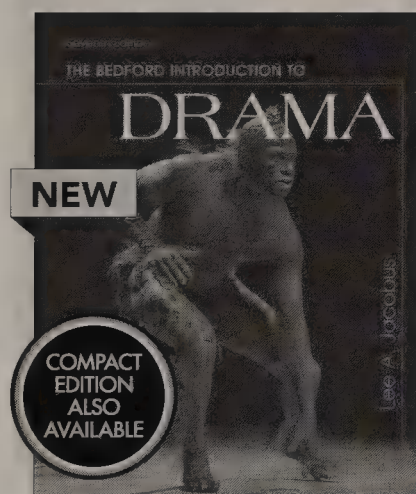
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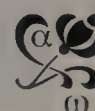
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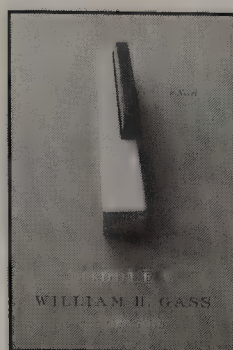
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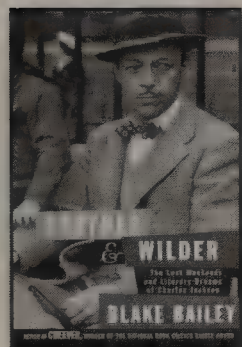
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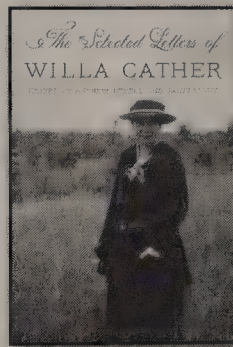
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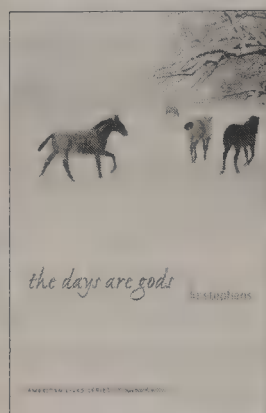
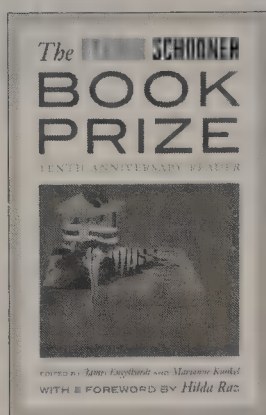
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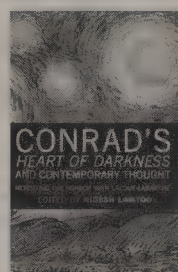
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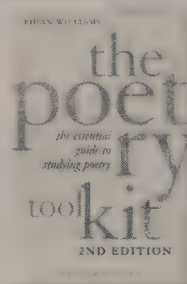


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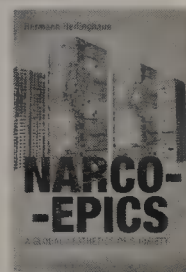


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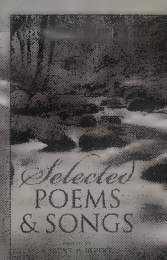
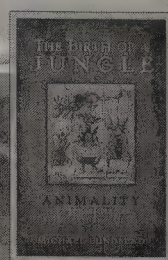
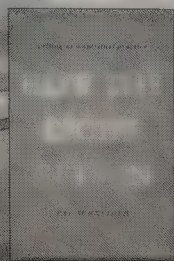


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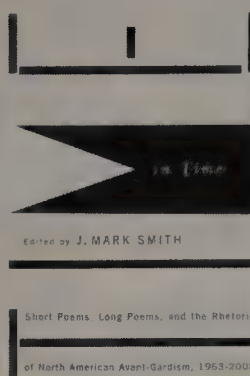
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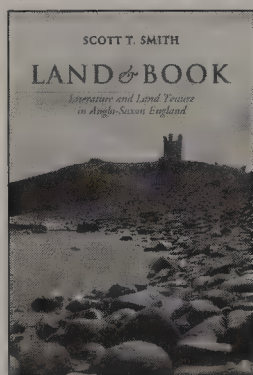
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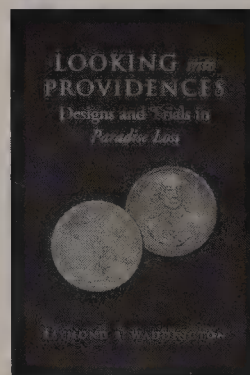
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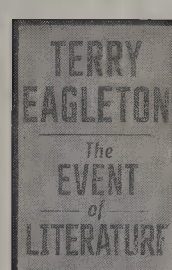
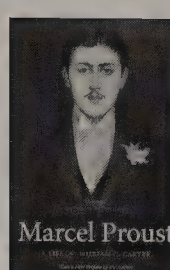
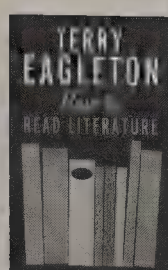
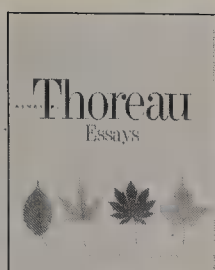
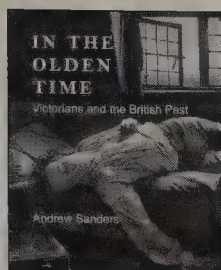
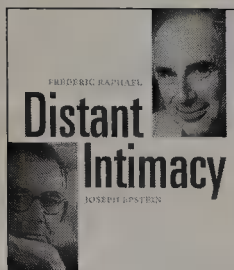
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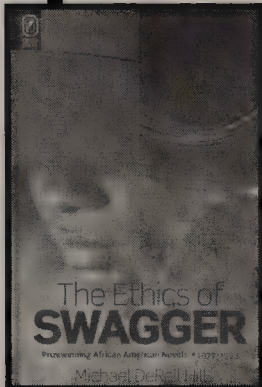
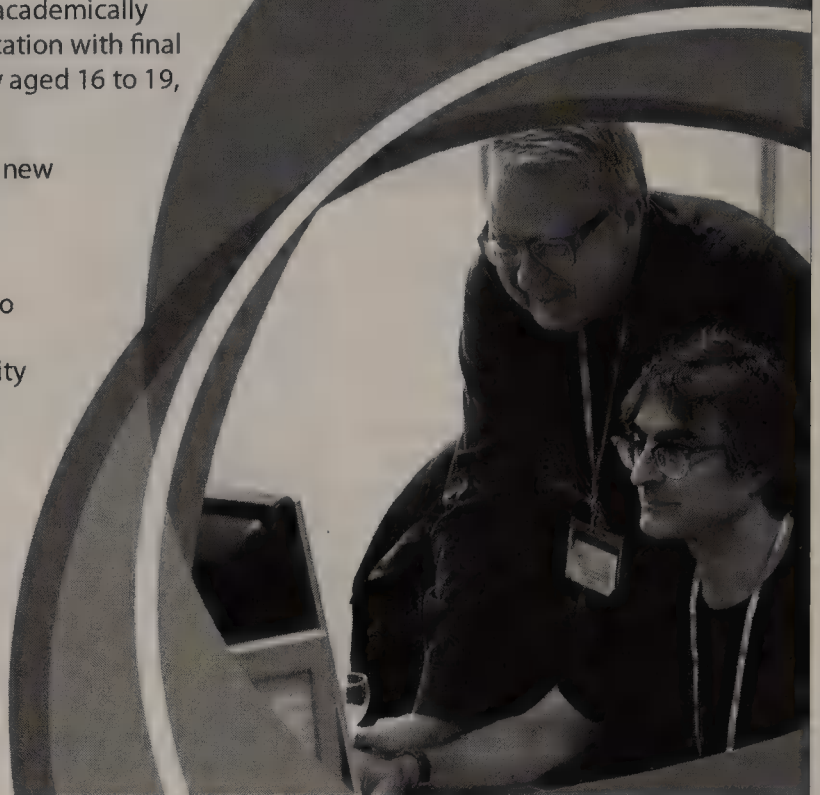
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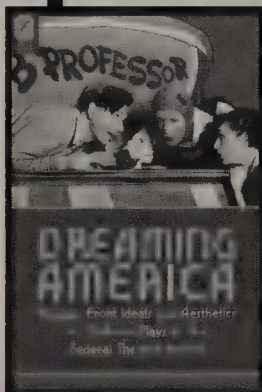


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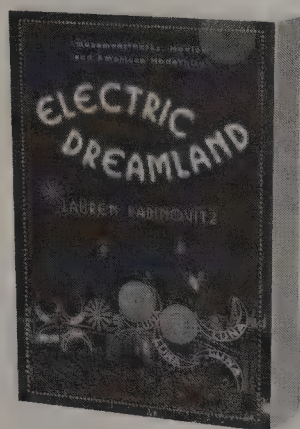
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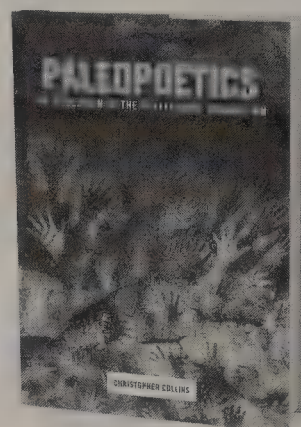
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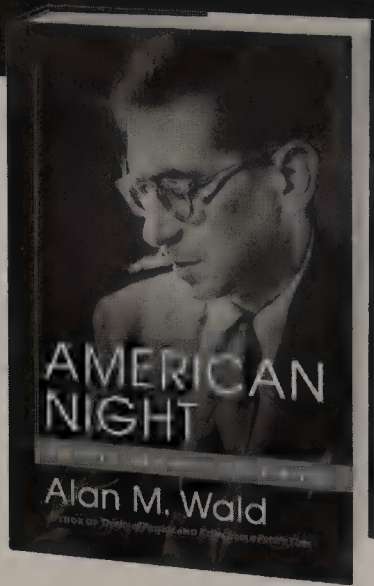
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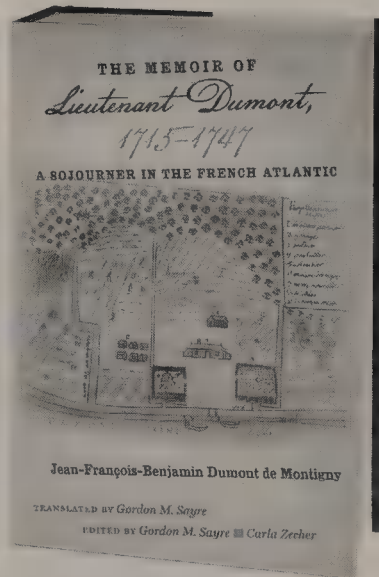
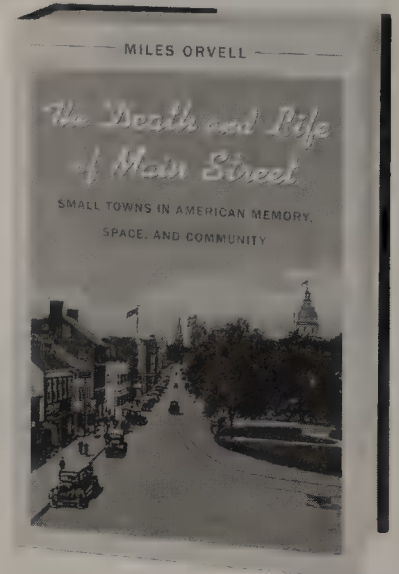
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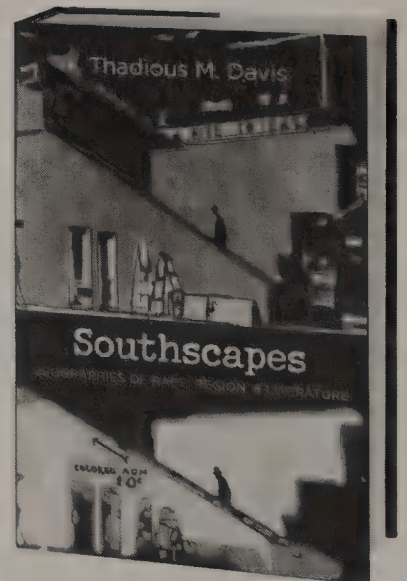
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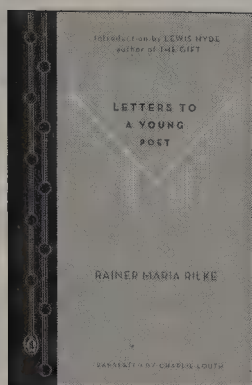
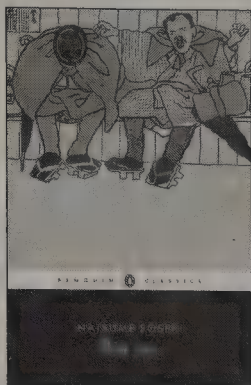
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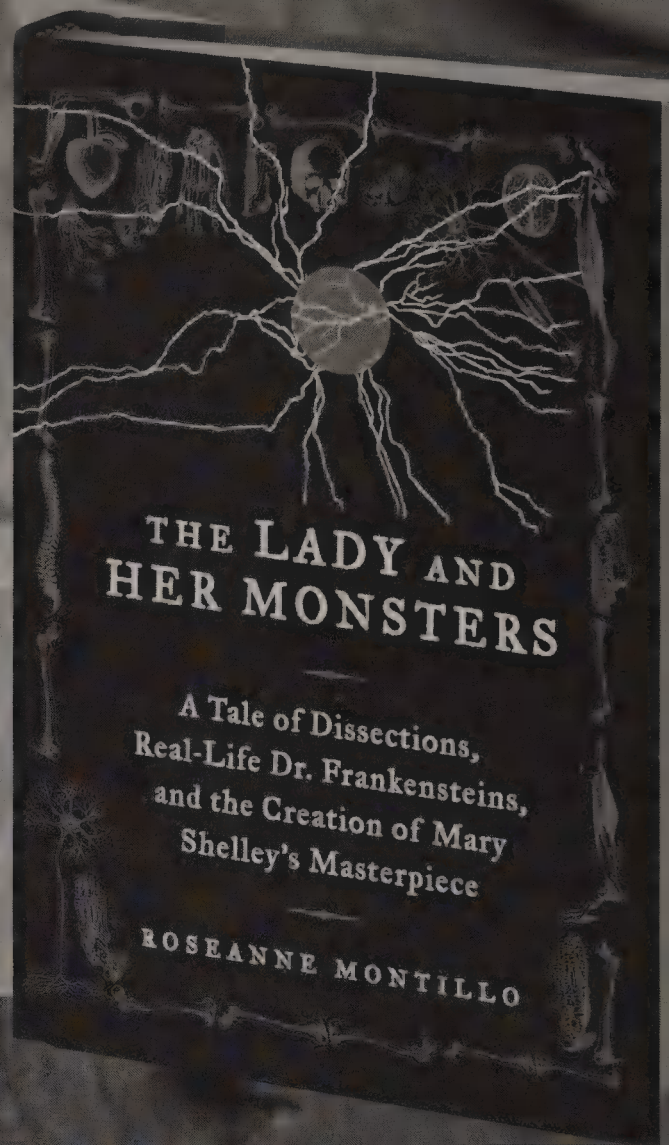
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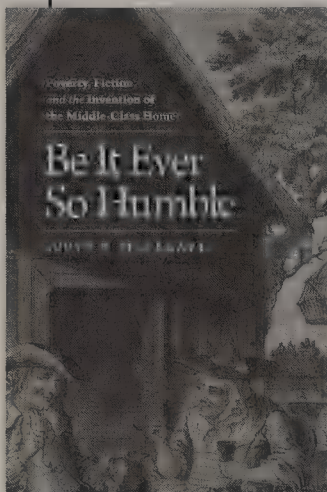


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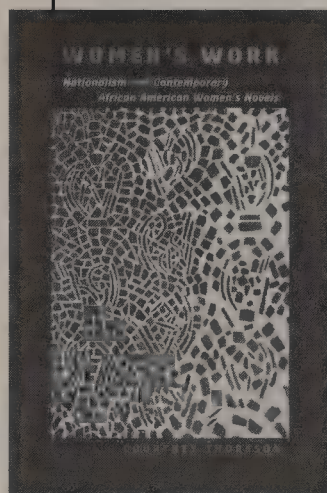
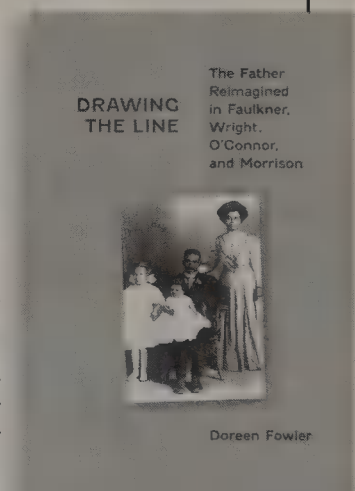
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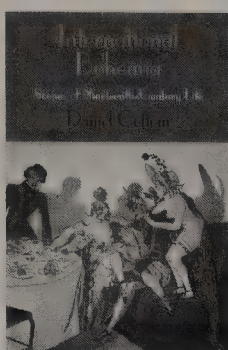
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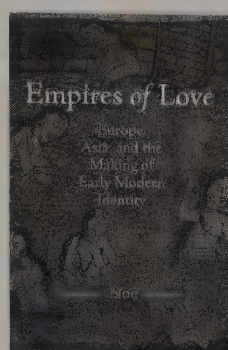
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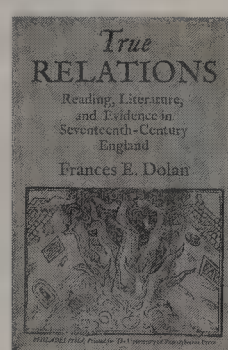
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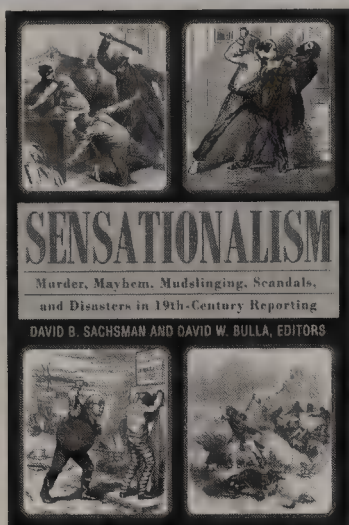
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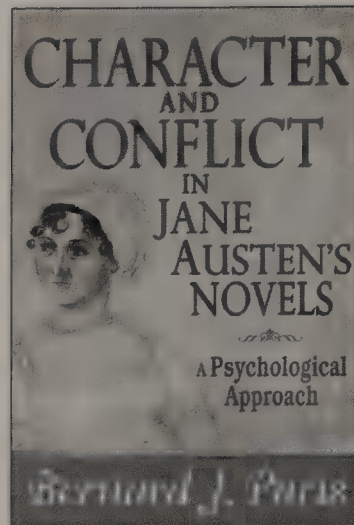
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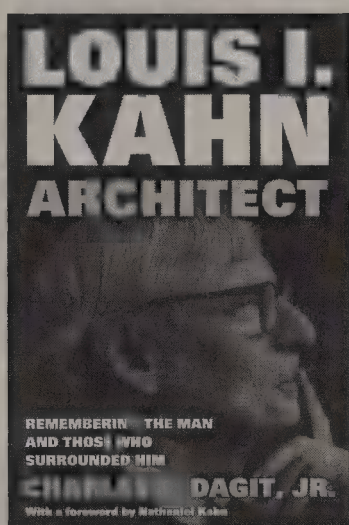
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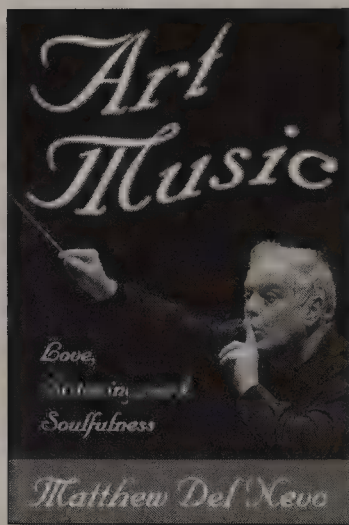
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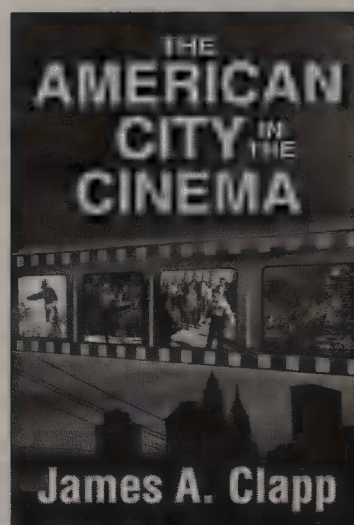
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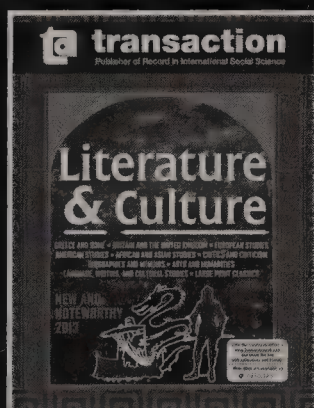
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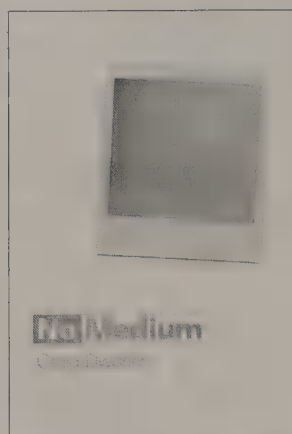
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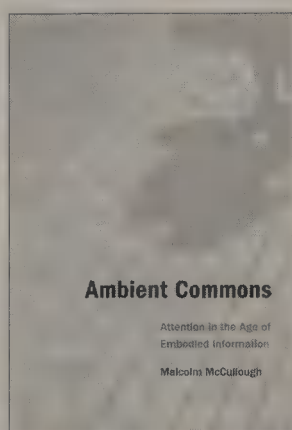


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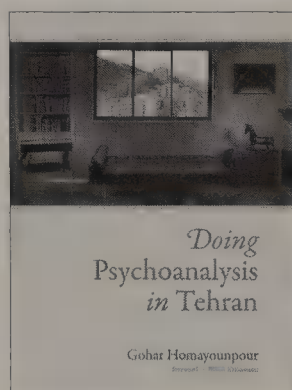
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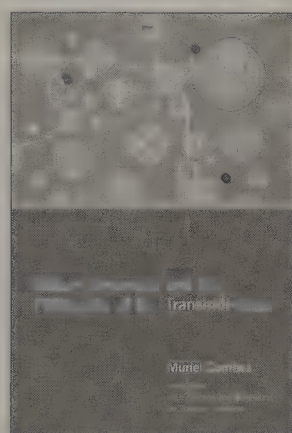
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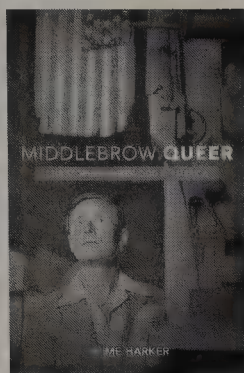
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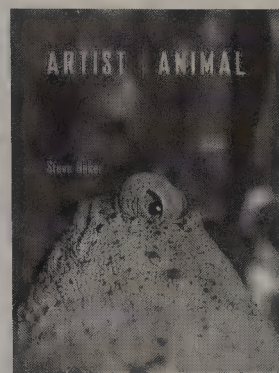
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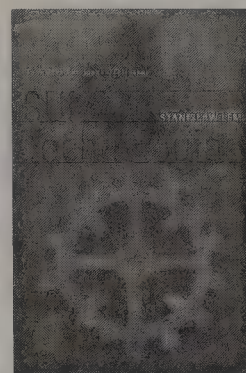
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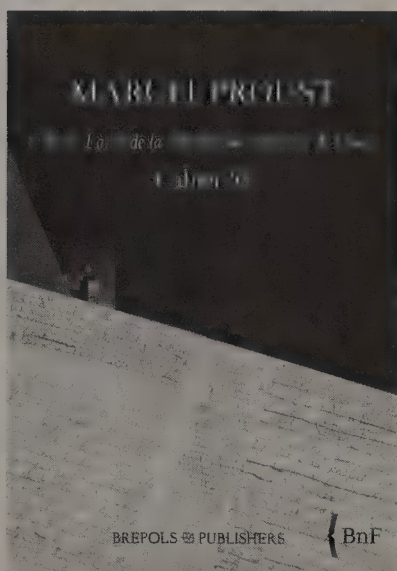
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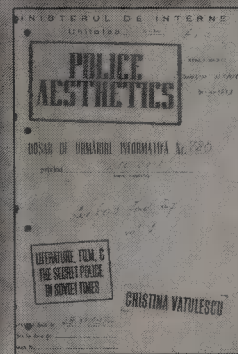
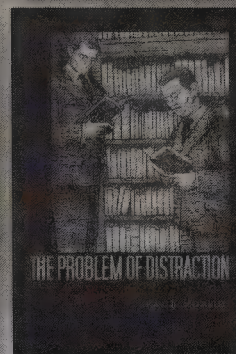
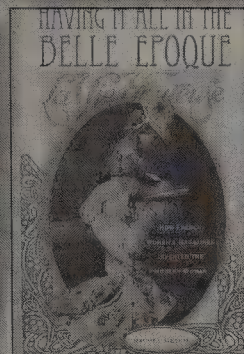
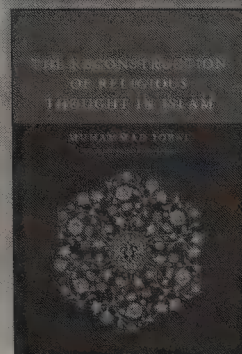
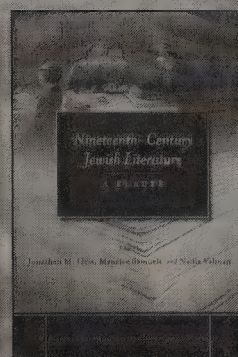
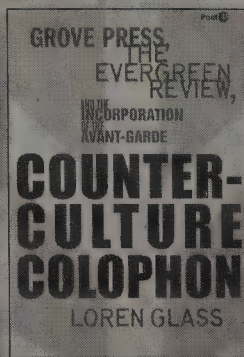
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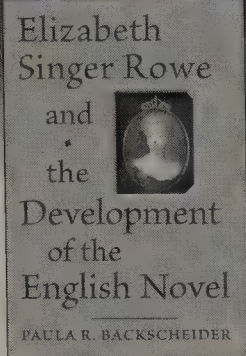
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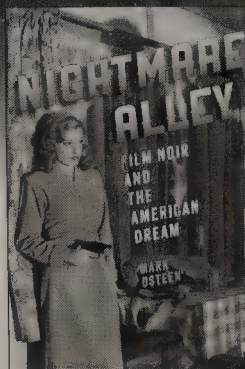
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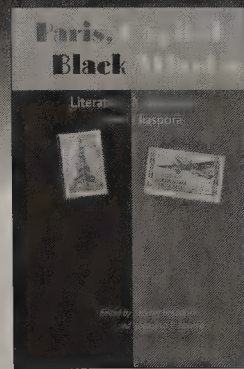
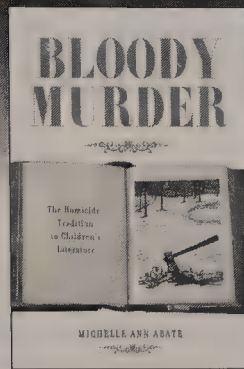
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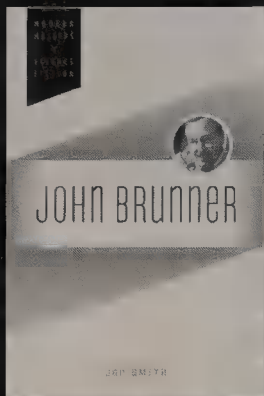
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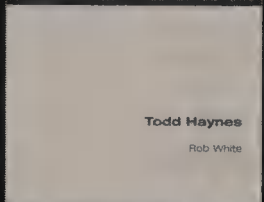
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299 **Robert Stilling, An Image of Europe: Yinka Shonibare's Postcolonial Decadence**

In 1891 Oscar Wilde argued that "Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of art." A hundred years later, the Anglo-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare MBE takes up where Wilde left off, arguing that "[t]o be an artist you have to be a good liar." This essay explores how Shonibare reinvents Wilde's antirealism for a globalized, postcolonial world. Building on Leela Gandhi's notion of "interested autonomy," I argue that in works such as his 2001 photo series *Dorian Gray*, Shonibare turns to Wilde's aestheticism as a means of upending the relation between realism and politics found in Chinua Achebe's critique of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, rediscovering the disparate racial and sexual geographies at stake in Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and in Albert Lewin's 1945 film version of it. Shonibare's postcolonial decadence, I argue, demonstrates how decadent aestheticism may become central to postcolonial imaginings of the real. (RS)

322 **Michael Collins, "Ali Even Motivates the Dead": The Pursuit of Sovereignty in Norman Mailer's *The Fight***

Norman Mailer was haunted by the specter of social death—a specter created for him by living as a Jew between the parentheses created by the Holocaust and the prospect of nuclear Armageddon. As an antidote to social death, Mailer sought its opposite—sovereignty within and beyond his writer's sphere. In the boxer Muhammad Ali, Mailer found an exemplar of the seizure of sovereignty within and beyond a sphere. *The Fight* chronicles the heavyweight championship battle between Ali and George Foreman in Zaire, a country treated like a private bank account by its dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko. I argue that Mailer regrettably failed to emphasize fully the fact that Zaire was exhibit B (the Vietnam War being the writer's inevitable exhibit A) in the case Mailer passionately made that the Cold War brutalized the American psyche. (MC)

337 **Benjamin Kohlmann, Awkward Moments: Melodrama, Modernism, and the Politics of Affect**

The modernist privileging of irony and detached contemplation frequently combined with a recognition of the social and artistic significance of affect. The relation between melodramatic structures of feeling and modernist innovation is evident in two plays of the interwar years: Bertolt Brecht and Elisabeth Hauptmann's *Happy End* and W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood's *On the Frontier*. Scholars need to develop a vocabulary that complements the customary critical emphasis on modernist "irony," "estrangement," and "difficulty" and that can be used to reconstruct the full force of the modernist uses of affect. Instead of estranging melodrama to make it palatable to an audience trained in high modernism, the negotiations between sentimentality and avant-garde aesthetics in *Happy End* and *On the Frontier* trigger a backward

dialectical movement in which the modernist rallying call to "make it new" blurs into the established patterns of melodrama. (BK)

- 353 **Olivia C. Harrison**, *Cross-Colonial Poetics: Souffles-Anfas and the Figure of Palestine*

From the mid-1960s onward, Moroccan, Algerian, and Tunisian writers have turned to the question of Palestine as a model of political and aesthetic innovation. Taking the Moroccan cultural journal *Souffles-Anfas* as an early, paradigmatic example of the literary turn to Palestine in the Maghreb, I argue that writers such as Abdellatif Laâbi and Abdelkebir Khatibi used Palestine as a springboard for "cultural decolonization," reactivating global anticolonial discourses in order to articulate a relational, cross-colonial Maghrebi identity. Focusing on discussions of language, poetic form, and cultural autonomy, I show that Palestine served as a point of reference in debates on postcolonial Maghrebi culture. Without muting the ethical pitfalls inherent in representing a heterogeneous anticolonial struggle in a postcolonial context, I take this example of cross-colonial poetics as an invitation to rethink along multidirectional, transnational lines the way we approach Maghrebi and, more generally, postcolonial literature and culture. (OCH)

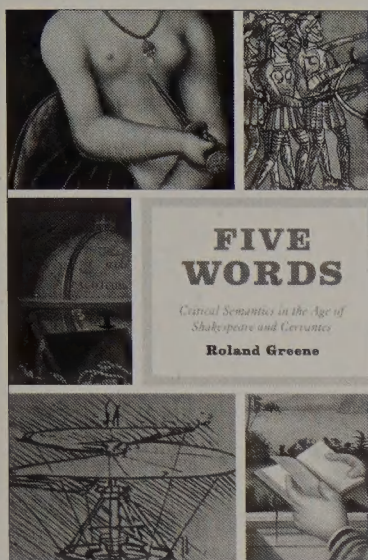
- 371 **Erik Gray**, *Come Be My Love: The Song of Songs, Paradise Lost, and the Tradition of the Invitation Poem*

The invitation poem, in which the beloved is urged to come away to an idealized place, is among the most enduring genres of European love poetry. The tradition begins with the biblical Song of Songs, which sets several important precedents: a dialogic framework, a close association of lover and landscape, and a sense of love as exile. Medieval and Renaissance invitation poems follow the Song of Songs but shift its emphases toward monologue, materialism, and importunity. Milton thus inherits a dual tradition of invitational poetry, both aspects of which figure prominently in *Paradise Lost*. Recognizing the traditional features of the genre therefore illuminates significant moments in the epic, including, notably, Eve's final speech. The invitational tropes in this passage reveal how Eve reconceives of exile as homecoming and how she reestablishes a sense of radical mutuality with Adam by completing a dialogue that began before the Fall. (EG)



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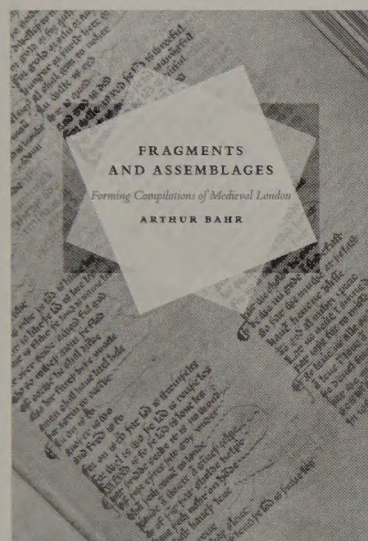
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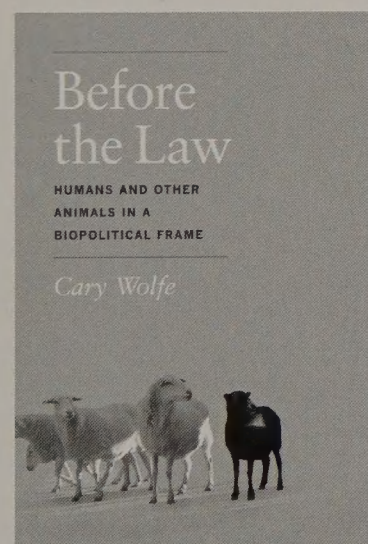
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